The role of the military instrument in Irish Republican strategic thinking.

Smith, Michael Lawrence Rowan

THE ROLE OF THE MILITARY INSTRUMENT IN IRISH REPUBLICAN STRATEGIC THINKING

AN EVOLUTIONARY ANALYSIS

by

Michael Lawrence Rowan SMITH

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ABSTRACT

Using the methods of strategic analysis, this research examines how the Irish republican movement has viewed the role of the military instrument in the political process. For much of its history the movement has been bound together by a series of ideological precepts such as the belief that Ireland is a continuing victim of British colonial exploitation, the commitment to the forcible expulsion of the British presence, as well as a refusal to compromise with, or even participate in, any of the political systems in Ireland. It has been these sorts of ideas which have shaped the way the republican movement thinks about the exploitation of military power. The movement's evolution up to the early twentieth century helped inspire a successful revolt against British rule. However, the unfulfilled expectations of the Anglo-Irish war, followed by the trauma of the Irish civil war, largely froze the strategic development of the movement. In the following years ideological symbolism came to dominate the IRA's strategic thinking. It has been this process which has sometimes led the military instrument to diverge from the norms of strategic theory as the ideology has prevented the movement from recognising when its strategies have been successful in fulfilling their potential. Persistence with a particular strategy, even though it may have outlived its usefulness, has led to missed opportunities and political marginalisation. Faced with defeat, the IRA searches around for a more effective strategy in which to recast the military instrument. During these searches, aspects of republican ideology have been challenged, though usually at the expense of a damaging split. Today, the IRA's long war approach is, rhetorically at least, less reliant on the myths of the past. But there are still questions over whether the process of strategic planning has been able to free itself from the influence of republican ideological rigidity. Overall, the IRA's willingness to embrace a whole range of low intensity war strategies creates the impression, contrary to the movement's vigorous and assertive public facade, of a republican strategic tradition characterised more by insecurity than by certainty and continuity.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ASU	Active Service Unit
CRA	Committee for Revolutionary Action
GHQ	General Headquarters (IRA)
ICA	Irish Citizen Army
INLA	Irish National Liberation Army
IPLO	Irish People's Liberation Organisation
IRA	Irish Republican Army
IRB	Irish Republican Brotherhood
IRSP	Irish Republican Socialist Party
MP	Member of Parliament
NICRA	Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association
NIO	Northern Ireland Office
OIRA	Official Irish Republican Army
PIRA	Provisional Irish Republican Army
PSF	Provisional Sinn Fein
RAC	Relatives Action Committee
RIC	Royal Irish Constabulary
RSF	Republican Sinn Fein
RUC	Royal Ulster Constabulary
SARAF	South Armagh Republican Action Force
SAS	Special Air Service
SDLP	Social Democratic and Labour Party
UDA	Ulster Defence Association
UDR	Ulster Defence Regiment
UFF	Ulster Freedom Fighters
UK	United Kingdom
UVF	Ulster Volunteer Force

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS IN FOOTNOTES

AP	*An Phoblacht*
AP/RN	*An Phoblacht/Republican News*
c.	*circa* - approximate date of publication
IRIS	Irish Republican Information Service
IRPB	Irish Republican Publicity Bureau
n.d.	no stated date of publication
n.p.	no stated place of publication
RN	*Republican News*
UI	*The United Irishman*

For My Parents

INTRODUCTION

The Provisional Irish Republican Army's (PIRA) Gaelic motto, *Tiocfaidh ar la* (Our day will come), would seem to demonstrate the sense of inevitability that many Irish republicans feel towards the eventual achievement of their goal; an end to British rule in Northern Ireland and the political unification of the island of Ireland. Yet the past two decades of PIRA activity reveal that republican faith in the historical tide is not so certain. Not certain enough for republicans to believe that they simply need do nothing and that one day the wave of the future will fall to the irresistible idea of Irish unity. For republicans, the goal of unity is a vision for which plans need to be made, campaigns organised and, in particular, armed force employed. Today, republican policy marches on a wide front encompassing electoral participation, economic and social agitation and propaganda. But the focus of republican action remains the unswerving commitment to the armed struggle. How the republican movement came, and continues, to see the practice of military force as an effective instrument of policy is the subject of this study.

It is important to stress that this analysis is not a history of the IRA or of republican nationalism. Neither is it concerned with detailing military tactics. Instead, this study sets out to test how responsive Irish republican employment of the military instrument has been to strategic theory. How has the republican movement viewed the role of force in the political process? What are the factors which condition republican strategic analysis? How effectively has the movement applied military means to fulfil political objectives? Does the movement possess a firm grasp of the limits of its military capabilities? Are there tensions between ideology and practical considerations regarding the use of force? These are the

sorts of questions which will be explored. In essence, it is about the composition and evolution of republican strategic thought.

In this research the term republicanism will refer to that section of Irish nationalism which continues to support and organise military operations in order to end any form of British rule in Ireland. Where the terms have become common descriptions, the Irish republican movement, the IRA and PIRA (or the Provisionals) can, except where specified, be taken to be synonymous. Obviously, this thesis cannot deal with every twist and turn in the republican movement's long and varied military history; therefore, the focus of this analysis will concentrate on the main agencies of republican violence throughout the years like the IRA and not ephemeral splinter groups like the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA) or the Irish People's Liberation Organisation (IPLO).

The analysis will be taken in two stages. The first stage will seek to examine some of the themes within the republican tradition that have evolved from the late eighteenth century and the nineteenth century. The intention is to identify how these themes would be likely to affect the future utilisation of the military instrument. This will be followed by an appraisal of the period between 1916 and 1923 which also had a key formative influence on the character of republican military thinking. Also surveyed in this first stage is the republican experience from the 1920s to the 1960s, a period in which many of the trends in the process of republican strategic formulation can be discerned. The second stage will concern itself with the activities of the Provisional IRA in Northern Ireland from the early 1970s to the present and will preoccupy the remaining chapters. This era has seen the most sustained levels of republican military activity. It has also embraced the greatest strategic innovation and, of course, remains the period of most contemporary relevance.

Strategic Theory

Conceptually, strategic theory is all about the 'use of available resources to gain any objective'.[1] The way the term 'strategy' has grown up often expressly denotes the use, or threat of use, of organised armed force in politics. The broadest but perhaps the most acceptable definition was that given by Liddell Hart who described strategy as the 'art of distributing and applying military means to fulfil the ends of policy'.[2] However, 'strategic theory: art or science?' has been a source of debate among strategists for a long time. The notion of a theory, as John Garnett observes, seems to promise some relationship to the 'hard sciences'.[3] One might see strategic theory existing on the same level as, say, micro and macro economics: an objective conceptual framework by which one can measure and generalise upon the practice of the military instrument. In truth, strategic theory cannot aspire to such an ideal. Often, the subject appears to fall between two stools. Too formalised to be an art. Too loose to be scientific. Strategic theory contains no code of hard and fast canons, but is more a way of looking at the issues of violence in politics. It is no different from most other subjects in the historical arts and social sciences in that it is reliant for its insights on assiduous research, careful judgement and intellectual rigour. Strategic theory is formalised in the sense that it usually carries a series of explicit assumptions which govern the way strategists view the role of military power. Naturally, it is only right that these conscious biases which are meant purposefully to affect the analysis are openly stated at the outset. It should be said that strategists do not always agree on the precise nature of the assumptions which underpin the discipline, still less on the important political issues that they study.

1. M. Howard, *The Causes of Wars* (London, 1983), p. 36.
2. B. Liddell Hart, *Strategy: The Indirect Approach* (London, 1967), p. 335.
3. J. Garnett, *Commonsense and the Theory of International Politics* (London, 1984), p. 1.

Nevertheless, as Garnett notes, most strategists belong to the same intellectual tradition and that 'though strategists sometimes disagree with each other, they rarely misunderstand each other.'[4]

The key assumptions and characteristics of strategic theory can be listed under three main headings.

War as an Instrument of Policy

To put it crudely, military power, as T.C. Schelling recognised, is about the capacity to hurt and destroy, to inflict 'shock, loss and grief, privation and horror'.[5] Although war is usually an ugly and unheroic enterprise, one of the principal assumptions of strategic theory is that military force is a functional aspect of power, deliberately employed to achieve political objectives. Of course, armed force is not always used in a politically instrumental fashion. There is no doubt, for example, that some elements in the loyalist paramilitaries in Northern Ireland have used their military muscle, not to obtain specifically political goals, but as a means to offer informal fire protection to some of Belfast's business enterprises.[6] PIRA's violence, on the other hand, sometimes seems more metaphorical than functional, geared towards asserting a form of moral legitimacy within the nationalist community, by projecting itself as the only organisation with sufficient will and stature to physically resist the British. Violence, on both sides, is also used to dispense 'paramilitary justice' to neighbourhood criminals and deal with factional feuds. Although violence can often be used in ways other than to attain policy objectives, they will not be treated in any detail here.

One must acknowledge that violence, even when practised by political actors, as Garnett has said, 'can develop a frightening momentum in which

4. J. Garnett, 'Strategic Studies and its Assumptions' in J. Baylis, *et al, Contemporary Strategy: Theories and Policies* (London, 1975) p. 9.
5. T. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven, Mass., 1966), p. 2.
6. See M. Dillon, *The Dirty War* (London, 1990), pp. 443-458.

political goals become submerged in senseless violence.'[7] Strategists are interested in such situations only in so far as they may affect the judgement of a political actor's strategic analysis. Usually though, 'extra-political' violence, especially if it is so evidently pathological, is not the preserve of strategic theory. For strategists, 'war' in the words of Clausewitz, is 'a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means',[8] and the deed of war itself, *'an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will.'*[9]

In the abstract, war, in its absolute form, is a single, almost instantaneous, blow to wipe out the enemy. Clausewitz argued that in theory all wars will have a tendency to work their way to an extreme where each side operates to the limits of its endurance. In reality, of course, war is limited from the absolute by any number of variables; finite resources, geography, logistics and so on. Therefore, war is never a single act, but usually consists of a series of engagements.'[10] This insight is important because it emphasises that real war is not simply about the crude application of military might but is a more calculating and competitive environment. This understanding helps to introduce us to the concepts of bargaining in war and limited war. Schelling takes the view that conflicts are usually bargaining situations where the 'ability of one participant to gain his ends is dependent to an important degree on the choices or decisions that the other participant will make.'[11] The aim is to manipulate the military instrument, not necessarily to inflict a crushing defeat on the enemy, but to influence his behaviour so that he complies with the adversary's demands. This process is especially noticeable in limited wars

7. J. Garnett, 'The Role of Military Power', in J. Baylis, *et al*, p. 50.
8. C. von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. and ed. M. Howard and P. Paret, (Princeton, N.J., 1984), p. 87.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 75.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 75-80.
11. T. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge, Mass., 1980), p. 5.

where one or other of the combatants does not feel it necessary to commit all of its resources to the conflict, possibly for example, because it has very limited objectives. In this context, the conduct of either one or both of the belligerents, will be governed by expectations of what the other will find acceptable and may necessitate the adoption of political goals which, though not perfect, will nevertheless be tolerable for both sides.

The notion of limited war is useful in that it helps us to comprehend those conflicts which exist between unequal participants. This is particularly relevant to the Irish republican case study as its strategic history has largely been about how the movement has tried to circumvent the superior power of the British. For groups like the IRA, coercive bargaining will normally involve indicating to the adversary, through military action, that the costs of not acceding to its political demands will outweigh the costs of concession. In this sort of conflict the weaker party may not be able to achieve any tangible military objectives, such as securing a piece of territory, instead, as Clausewitz observed, 'another military objective must be adopted that will serve the political purpose and symbolise it in peace negotiations.'[12] In this regard, a belligerent may feel, for example, that given the means at its disposal trying to exhaust the enemy's patience with a series of small-scale attacks would be a more appropriate military aim. When political actors seek these types of intangible military objectives strategic planning takes on an even more intriguing dimension as it requires, amongst other things, both a highly sophisticated understanding of the utility of the military instrument, particularly how it may be exploited in a psychological sense, and a careful appreciation of adversarial power.

The limited war concept embraces the whole range of low intensity war strategies, including that of terrorism. It is regrettable that the indiscriminate use of the word 'terrorism' by all parties to the Irish

12. Clausewitz, p. 81.

conflict has turned it into a divisive term of abuse. Strategists should have no difficulty in defining terrorism as the deliberate creation of fear, through the use or threat of use, of military force for political ends. Just like any other strategy, it can be regarded as a neutral instrument of policy which can be employed by state and non-state actors alike without moral judgement being passed on those who practise it. This is how the term will be used in this analysis and will be applied carefully only when it is believed that it represents an accurate description of republican activity at any particular time.

Additionally, it is worth pointing out that while the phrase the 'military instrument' conveys the sense in which force is being used in pursuit of policy objectives, strategic theory actually makes no moral or legal distinctions between descriptions of political violence. Therefore, words like 'force', 'violence', 'armed struggle', and so on, can be treated as perfectly decent strategic terms and will be used inter-changeably with the term 'military instrument'. It should also be added that the notion of 'war' in this context describes only clashes of organised armed force and does not imply any legal protocol covering areas such as formal declarations of war or treatment of prisoners in captivity, etc..

The Power Political Approach

Underpinning the assumption of the instrumentality of war is the notion of power politics. It is an idea which is often closely associated with the so-called realist school of international political theory.[13] To simplify the arguments of the realist tradition, it can be said to represent a view which accepts a world of competing political entities, each pursuing their interests, as the chief regulator of the international system. Political

13. See K. Holsti, *International Politics: A Framework of Analysis* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1977), pp. 3-25.

actors within the system will seek to enhance their power relative to others in order to defend their interests.'[14] Thus, war is regarded as a liablility of the political system, in both the international and domestic environments, as clashes of interest will, from time to time, lead to military hostilities. The essence of the realist position has been summed up by Gordon Harland: 'Realism is a clear recognition of the limits of morality and reason in politics: the acceptance of the fact that political realities are power realities and that power must be countered with power; that self-interest is the primary datum in the action of all groups and nations.'[15]

The power political approach is the wider context in which most strategists see the role of the military instrument. The concept of power is a complex idea in itself but can be defined here, in the words of S.R. Purnell, as 'the capacity of an individual or an organisation to have his or its way.'[16] Military strength is only one attribute of power.[17] Few strategists would, to misquote Mao, subscribe to the belief that political power grows *only* out of the barrel of a gun. It is certainly true, however, that the destructive potential of military power often makes those who possess it in large quantities highly influential. Within the political system power often remains latent as it can only be realised when it is exerted on something else in the system, usually another political actor. To this extent, war is one of the few ways in which an actual power relationship can be accurately determined. In this respect the Irish republican movement is ripe for strategic analysis because of the way in which it has constantly sought to mobilise its resources for conflict with Britain.

Because strategic theorists recognise established positions of power

14. See A. Wolfers, *Discord and Collaboration* (Baltimore, 1962), pp. 82-83 and p. 89.
15. Quoted in Garnett, 'Strategic Studies and its Assumptions', p. 11.
16. S. Purnell, *The Society of States* (London, 1973), p. 128.
17. For a full discussion of the nature of power see J. Spanier, *Games Nations Play* (New York, 1984), pp. 119-296.

they do not directly concern themselves with issues of causality. While every effort will be made to present the evolution of republican strategy within its proper historical context, it will not seek to explain, for instance, why political violence occurs or why events happened in the manner they did. If strategic analysis throws any light on these sorts of questions then this is all to the good but it is not the primary task. The job of the strategic theorist is to examine how political actors define the circumstances around them and how they react to those circumstances to achieve their objectives. One result of this approach is that strategic theory is characterised by a degree of innate conservatism. This is not because strategists necessarily approve of the *status quo*. It is purely an academic stance in the sense that the onus is put on those who advocate a change in the *status quo* to demonstrate that they have the wherewithal - the power - to do it.

Rationality and the Primacy of Political Control in War

The presupposition of both of the preceding assumptions is the belief that political actors are behaving rationally. F. Lopez-Alves has described rational action simply and effectively as conduct which 'is determined by the endeavour to relate means to ends as efficiently as possible'.[18] How one calculates rationality is altogether more difficult. Complete rationality requires perfect information and total objectivity. For strategists to pontificate on rationality might suggest that they are somehow endowed with remarkable powers of reasoning denied to all other human beings. Such *hubris*, if possessed by strategists, would devalue any analysis. The assumption of rationality 'does not suppose' as Lopez-Alves comments, 'that all rational decisions are right ones' merely that an 'actor's decisions are

18. F. Lopez-Alves, 'Political Crises, Strategic Choices, and Terrorism: The Rise and Fall of the Uruguayan Tuparmaros', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, (London) Vol. 1, April 1989, No. 2, p. 204.

made after careful cost-benefit calculation, and the means chosen seem optimal to accomplish the desired end."[19] Strategists assume rationality because they cannot really assume anything else. One may conclude after surveying the evidence that an actor is misapplying the military instrument. But it cannot be assumed at the outset that the actor is irrational. This would be a job for the psychologists not the strategists.

Within the framework of strategic theory, commentary on rationality tends to focus on the means of policy. This does not preclude thinking through the implications of a chosen course of action to its logical conclusion or, where appropriate, an examination of the various options open to a political actor. However, as the discussion above implies, the assumption of rationality presumes that the political ends are not totally incompatible with the means. If it were obvious that this was the case then strategists would never attempt an analysis in the first place. All that this means in this context is that as a general rule, strategic theory remains academically disinterested in the moral validity of the ends of policy. Accordingly, this study will have nothing to say on the desirability or otherwise of Irish republican objectives like a united Ireland. Assessment in this analysis will be offered only in so far as decisions regarding the military instrument appear to help or hinder the achievement of political goals.

Closely connected with the assumption of rationality and the relationship between means and ends, is the idea of the primacy of political control in war. Clausewitz argued that war is not simply a sustained burst of violence to achieve the political ends sought, but is a more variable phenomenon. 'War moves on its own goal with varying speed', Clausewitz said, 'but it always lasts long enough for influence to be exerted on the goal and for its own course to be changed one way or another - long enough, in other

19. *Ibid.*, p. 204.

words, to remain subject to the action of a superior intelligence.'[20] As war results from a political purpose it is this element which will 'remain the supreme consideration'[21] in its conduct. 'Policy, then, will permeate all military operations, and in so far as their violent nature will admit, it will have a continuous influence on them.'[22] This observation is crucial to our understanding of rationality within strategic theory as it recognises that the correlation of ends and means can shift in war. If the ends are proving unobtainable the political actor may seek to reformulate his strategy either by changing the means or moderating the objectives. Clausewitz was not saying that this is an inevitable process in warfare, merely that wars are sufficiently drawn out affairs for the political authority, if it so wishes, to calibrate the war to ensure that the overall aims do not outrun the means to achieve them. In this way, the conduct of war can be kept within the realms of rational activity.

The Strategic Approach to the Irish Republican Movement

Overall, strategic theory is not about the study of war *per se*. It is only one branch, arguably even just a sub-branch, of a much wider study of military power. It is just one approach among many with limited terms of reference as outlined above.. To preserve structure and maintain critical judgement this research will be held tightly within this framework.

Like most analytical frameworks, strategic theory offers a way of reducing an amorphous mass to manageable proportions and of imposing intellectual structure and discipline where there may well be none. No single theory can deal with the complex reality of Irish republican violence in its entirety. Therefore, it should be emphasised that the use of theory in this research is designed, not to promote any particular view through prediction

20. Clausewitz, p. 87.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 87.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 87.

or prescription, but to help investigate, understand and explain some of the questions arising from the republican movement's practice of military force.

To this extent, the strategic approach is not a rigid concept. Because each situation varies so enormously in both time and place, it is impossible to elaborate durable and all-embracing strategic models. Strategic theory can only delineate norms of expected logical behaviour within any specific situation. The accent will not therefore be placed on relating republican activity specifically to pre-existing theories of conventional or unconventional war. Instead, the analysis will concentrate on viewing the evolution of republican strategy as a process unique within its own historical context while the effectiveness of the movement's military conduct will be interpreted through the broad principles of strategic evaluation set down here. This flexibility will allow the analysis to develop without suggesting either that Irish republican strategy is somehow exceptionally deficient in the annals of warfare or that the methods of analysis constitute immutable principles of strategic law.

The Historical Background

Because this thesis concentrates on developing arguments and themes it does not always hold to the chronology within the chapters. Therefore, it is useful, at this point, to anchor the analysis by giving a very brief historical resume of the period from the late eighteenth century up to the Easter rising in Dublin in 1916, from which the modern IRA would emerge in the subsequent years. In this way, a general appreciation of the origins and growth of the Irish republican tradition can be gained.

The prevailing character of Irish political history has reflected the turbulent themes of migration, invasion, rebellion and repression. The primary source of this turbulence over the centuries arose from the tension

between Ireland and England, or more specifically from Irish resistance to the steady encroachment of English influence. The migration of settlers between the islands of Great Britain and Ireland had been common enough during the centuries but the political and religious turmoil caused by the Reformation era sharpened English interest in securing territorial control over Ireland. Fear that the forces of the Counter-Reformation, like Spain, would seek to use Catholic Ireland as a base to invade Great Britain, spurred Protestant England's attempts to pacify the country. The most notable attempts at pacification were the Protestant plantations of the early seventeenth century. The planters were of mainly Scots Presbyterian stock and the majority settled in the province of Ulster in the North-East of Ireland, displacing many local Catholics from the land in the process. Overall, the years of tension and conflict ensured that Ireland experienced continual political instability with all its attendant violent consequences.

In 1782 the Irish Parliament in Dublin gained a substantial measure of legislative independence from London, though the franchise was not universal and excluded both Catholics and Presbyterians (also called Dissenters) from power. The parliament and the administration were controlled by the small Anglo-Irish aristocracy, known as the Protestant Ascendancy. Catholic resentment towards the Ascendency focused chiefly on the exploitative, near feudal, situation on the land which condemned the Irish peasantry to a precarious existence at the edges of starvation. This period witnessed considerable agrarian violence carried out by small oath-bound groups, often referred to generically as the 'Whiteboys'. Their activities usually consisted of small-scale raids such as firing into farmhouses, mutilating cattle and the burning of haystacks.[23] The violence was not directly political in nature but intended to alleviate conditions on the land for the tenantry.

23. For a useful survey see M. Beames, *Peasants and Power: The Whiteboy Movement and their Control in Pre-Famine Ireland* (Brighton, 1983), especially pp. 71-88 and pp. 204-217.

Generally, despite the continued plight of the peasantry there was little sign that the Catholic population harboured thoughts of political revolution. Instead, the main political challenge came from a reform group representing principally the increasingly affluent Presbyterians who were angered that while their economic importance was growing, they continued to be denied political influence.

The American and French revolutions gave great encouragement to those in Ireland who sought political change and helped stimulate the formation of the Society of the United Irishmen in 1791. The Society proclaimed that it had been: 'constituted for the purpose of forwarding a Brotherhood of Affection, a Communion of Rights, and a union of Power among Irishmen of every religious persuasion, and thereby to obtain *a complete Reform in the Legislature*, founded on the Principles of civil, political and religious liberty.'[24] By embracing the issue of political reform, in particular the enfranchisement of Catholics, this Dissenter dominated society gained considerable sympathy. But by 1794 the society had lost faith in the reform process and reorganised itself into a secret organisation which aimed to conspire, with French help, to overthrow British rule. The United Irishmen launched their rebellion on 23 May 1798. Forewarned by informers, the Irish administration moved quickly to suppress the rising and arrested most of the leading conspiritors, including the rebel commander, Lord Fitzgerald. Leaderless and ill prepared, the rebellion was quickly put down, though solid resistance in the South around Wexford continued until early July when the rebels were finally defeated at the Battle of Vinegar Hill.

The 1798 rebellion is seen as the key event which marked the emergence of the Irish republican tradition. Attention has been focused on the role played by one of the conspiritors, Theobald Wolfe Tone. Tone had been a leading advocate of Catholic emancipation and had been despatched to France

24. Quoted in T. Jackson, *Ireland Her Own* (London, 1946), p. 99.

in order to seek military assistance to support the rebellion in Ireland. French forces eventually landed over a month after the collapse of the rising and were soon defeated by stronger British forces. The final chapter in the proceedings was played out in late September when another French invasion force was intercepted off the North-West coast of Ireland by the Royal Navy. Amongst those captured was Wolfe Tone who was sentenced to hang for his part in the conspiracy but committed suicide on the 19 November 1798.

Tone was, in fact, a relatively minor figure in the 1798 rebellion. Further, historians suggest that he was something of a colonial misfit who embraced the cause of Irish independence, turning against his own Protestant Ascendancy roots after his schemes for colonial expansion in the South Seas were rebuffed by the British government.[25] Moreover, both Tone and the United Irishmen, it is said, cared little for the downtrodden peasantry and even less for Catholicism and were prepared to endorse Catholic emancipation only in order to lever themselves and their Dissenter dominated clique into power.[26] There is no doubt that the veneration of Tone within contemporary republicanism owes much to nationalist myth building. His reputation was really made only by later writers, like Patrick Pearse in the early twentieth century, who declared that Tone: 'stands first in point of time, and first in point of greatness. Indeed, he is, I believe, the greatest man of our nation'.[27]

Pearse saw in Tone's thoughts and actions the embodiment of the republican philosophy. In the first instance, it was Tone who enunciated the basic tenet of Irish republican principle; that separation from England was the essential pre-requisite for the Irish nation to realise its potential.

25. See R. Kee, *The Green Flag* (London, 1978), p. 48.
26. See T. Dunne, *Theobald Wolfe Tone: An Analysis of His Political Philosophy* (Cork, 1982), p. 17-18 and p. 57.
27. P. Pearse, *Political Writings and Speeches* (Dublin, 1952), pp. 263-264.

Tone confided that: 'From my earliest youth I have regarded the connection between Ireland and Great Britain as the curse of the Irish nation, and felt convinced that, whilst it lasted, this country could never be free nor happy.'[28]

Secondly, Tone appeared to those like Pearse as the champion of the unity of the Irish people. In one of his most renowned passages, Tone wrote of his desire: 'To unite the whole people of Ireland, to abolish the memory of all past dissensions, and to substitute the common name of Irishmen in place of the denominations of Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter'.[29] It was Tone's belief that only a union between Catholics and Protestants could challenge the ruling establishment. In order to do this the bulk of the Catholic masses would have to be mobilised. This meant that the Protestants would have to commit themselves to Catholic political and economic emancipation. Tone expressed his views in a pamphlet he drew up in 1791, *An Argument on Behalf of Catholics in Ireland by a Northern Whig*, which he said was aimed at convincing his colleagues in the United Irishmen:

> that they and the Catholics had but one common interest and one common enemy; that the depression and slavery of Ireland was produced and perpetuated by the divisions existing between them, and that, consequently, to assert the independence of their country, and their own individual liberties, it was necessary to forget all former feuds, to consolidate the entire strength of the whole nation, and to form for the future but one people.'[30]

Finally, Tone's significance lay in the image of martyrdom. He had sought to rouse Ireland through rebellion to challenge British rule and had paid with his life. This was the ultimate expression of commitment to the national cause. In subsequent years this was to give rise to a powerful cult of martyrdom which introduced a strong transcendental element into republicanism, implying that it was worthy to pursue the purified vision of

28. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 282.
29. P. MacAonghusa and L. O'Reagain, *The Best of Wolfe Tone* (Cork, 1972), p. 46.
30. Quoted in Pearse, p. 270.

the Irish nation, even though it may end in death. It was this image on which many nationalists drew for inspiration. In 1898, on the centenary of the United Irishmen's rebellion, the nationalist parliamentarian, John Dillon, proclaimed that Tone and his colleagues had provided 'a precious inheritance to the Irish people, and one which, if studied and acted upon, will in my judgement, be the best guidance to the patriot's part'.[31] For all these reasons Tone is seen as the personification of the republican spirit.

The aftermath of the 1798 rebellion saw the imposition of the Act of Union in 1801 which abolished the Irish assembly and transferred the administration of Ireland to Westminster. In reaction to these developments remnants of the United Irishmen conspiracy plotted another rising which was launched on 23 July 1803. The attempted seizure of Dublin Castle, the seat of government in Ireland, failed and the rebellion quickly disintegrated. Realising the futility of the proceedings the rebel leader, Robert Emmet, called off the insurrection and fled Dublin. He was caught a month later and hanged on 20 September 1803. Although the rising was a fiasco, Emmet's death was another highly symbolic event which went to build up republican martyrology, particularly due to Emmet's eloquent defence of the aspiration to Irish independence at his trial in which he declared: 'Let no man write my epitaph [until] my country can take her place among the nations of the earth'.[32]

The period from 1800 to 1830 saw the rapid industrialisation of the Protestant dominated province of Ulster. Economic growth also drew large numbers of Catholics towards the North-East to take advantage of the opportunities opened up by commercial expansion. Fear that the influx of Catholics would pose a danger to their way of life and commercial position

31. Quoted in D. Boyce, 'Water for the Fish: Terrorism and Public Opinion', in A. O'Day and Y. Alexander (eds.), *Terrorism in Ireland* (London, 1984), p. 152.
32. Quoted in M. Elliott, *Partners in Revolution* (London, 1982), p. 370.

persuaded most Protestants to embrace the Act of Union. It was against this background of economic and political polarisation between North and South and between Catholic and Protestant that largely put an end to Dissenter agitation for independence and from which the force of Ulster unionism would emerge.

Meanwhile, Catholics were also coalescing in political terms around the personality of Daniel O'Connell who led the Catholic Association, formed in 1823, which successfully mobilised popular opinion to gain increased land rights for the peasantry. O'Connell's leadership did much to awaken Irish national consciousness, distilling a common sense of identity which crossed nearly all sections of Catholic society. Later, O'Connell campaigned at the head of the Repeal Association which aimed to revoke the Act of Union and to restore the Irish parliament.

Within the repeal movement a group of young radicals known as Young Ireland were to provide the next link in the Irish republican historical chain. The Young Irelanders were not really rebels so much as cultural romantics who believed that the definition of a vibrant national and cultural tradition was a necessary pre-condition to substantiate any claim for self-government. The group's newspaper, *The Nation*, edited by Thomas Davis, evoked the image of a rich and heroic cultural heritage. 'Nationality is [our] first great object', the Young Irelanders stated, 'Nationality which will not only raise our people from their poverty, by securing to them the blessings of a DOMESTIC LEGISLATURE, but inflame and purify them with a lofty and heroic love of country'.[33] Young Ireland proclaimed force as a virtue. Thomas Meagher declared that 'be it for defence or be it for the assertion of a nation's liberty I look upon the sword as a sacred weapon'.[34] Rarely,

33. Source: Prospectus of a Dublin Weekly Journal to be called *The Nation*, 8 Oct. 1842, reprinted in D. Gwynn, *Young Ireland and 1848* (Cork, 1949), pp. 6-9.
34. Quoted in D. Boyce, *Nationalism in Ireland* (London, 1982), p. 169.

though, did the group advocate the adoption of a policy of physical force. Instead those like Davis saw the cultivation of a strong, gallant Irish military tradition as a means of cultural regeneration to engender national self-respect.[35].

The newspaper, *The Nation* did become more militant following the death of Davis in 1845 when John Mitchel became its editor. With the failure of the repeal movement to make headway Mitchel had become disillusioned with constitutional politics. Moreover, policy differences with O'Connell caused the group to split from the main repeal movement to set up a separate organisation, the Irish Confederation, in January 1847. Mitchel openly glorified physical force, arguing that the 'true and only method of regenerating Ireland might in course of time recommend itself to a nation so long abused and deluded by "legal" humbug'.[36] His belligerence found little sympathy with the rest of the Young Irelanders and he broke from the movement to form his own paper, *The United Irishman*, in which he called for the arming of the peasantry in order to wage a 'Holy War... in this island to sweep it clean of the English name and nation.'[37]

Mitchel's writings were treated as seditious by the British and he was sentenced to 14 years penal servitude in Australia in May 1848. Shortly before his arrest Mitchel came under the influence of James Fintan Lalor, a contemporary thinker, who advocated linking agrarian reforms with nationalist issues. Lalor criticised the moderates in Young Ireland. 'They wanted an alliance with the land owners' he said, 'they desired, not a democratic, but merely a national revolution'.[38] Lalor argued that the immediate cause of Ireland's misery lay in the land system. He suggested a

35. R. Davis, *The Young Ireland Movement* (Dublin, 1987), p. 249.
36. Source: *The Nation*, 8 Jan. 1848, quoted in P. O'Hegarty, *A History of Ireland Under the Union, 1801-1922* (London, 1952), p. 343.
37. Source: *The United Irishman*, 12 Feb. 1848, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 351.
38. Quoted in R. Munck, *Ireland: Nation State and Class Struggle* (Boulder, Colorado, 1985).

programme of non-violent protest and non-co-operation involving non-payment of rents and taxes to undermine the landlords and establish peasant proprietorship. Lalor believed that land held the key to the nationalist question as he felt the populace could be more effectively mobilised for tangible goals like land reform than for more abstract notions of national rights.[39] Lalor's ideas were to have a significant influence on later republican thinkers like James Connolly who praised Lalor as the 'Irish apostle of revolutionary socialism.' His writings, Connolly said, contained 'not only the best plan of campaign suited for the needs of a country seeking its freedom through insurrection against a dominant nation, but also held the seeds of the more perfect social peace of the future.'[40]

In 1848 the Young Irelanders were swept up by the revolutionary fervour spreading through continental Europe, and they began to openly proclaim the desirability of an insurrection. Taking the Young Irelanders' pronouncements more seriously than they deserved, the authorities moved to arrest the movement's leaders. The remnants of the leadership fled and mounted a brief uprising which was defeated after a short skirmish at Ballingarry, Co. Tipperary, on 5 August 1848. The rising had been a fiasco. But the legacy of the Young Ireland era did make an important contribution to the development of Irish republicanism. It was Davis who helped build the republican vision of a distinctive and integrated national culture. Mitchel did much to articulate the elemental aversion to English influence, describing the British empire as 'the most base and horrible tyranny that has ever scandalised the face of the earth.'[41] And although Lalor's thinking about the land reform issue evoked little response from the peasantry dispirited by the potato famine which ravaged Ireland between 1845 and 1848, his ideas were to have a major impact later in the century.

39. L. McCaffrey, *The Irish Question, 1800-1922* (Lexington, Kentucky, 1968).
40. J. Connolly Heron (ed.), *The Words of James Connolly* (Cork, 1986), p. 75.
41. Quoted in G. Costigan, *A History of Modern Ireland* (New York, 1969).

Finally, Young Ireland represented continuity in the republican tradition. Even though the 1848 rising was a debacle, it could also be depicted as another symbolic stand by selfless patriots who had given up their livelihoods for the cause of Irish liberty.

The enormous hardship caused by the famine and the failure of further attempts at land reform, helped stimulate the formation of the Irish Revolutionary (later Republican) Brotherhood (IRB) which was established on 17 March 1858. The IRB, which became more popularly known as the Fenians, had two wings. One wing was established amongst the Irish diaspora in the USA caused by mass emigration during the famine and led by John O'Mahoney. The other wing in Ireland was led by James Stephens. Unlike their predecessors in the United Irishmen and the Young Irelanders, who had felt driven to rebellion as an act of last resort, the Fenians rejected British rule from the start and dedicated themselves to its overthrow by force. The Fenian newspaper, *The Irish People*, vigorously promulgated the message of physical force separatism: 'independence, which, we are never tired of repeating, can be won but by one method. This sometimes fails to achieve independence but no method ever succeeded in winning it'.[42]

James Stephens cautiously set about preparing the IRB for revolt. However, the organisation was often fractious. Stephens twice postponed the date for an uprising. He was deposed by a faction under T.J. Kelly which had been pressing for an early rising in Ireland. The Fenians eventually mounted their rising in March 1867. It was a shambolic affair. Planning was inadequate and the population remained passive. Only in Kerry and Limerick was there any sustained resistance. The authorities put down the rising in a matter of days. As an attempt to seize power it was a hopeless enterprise. Even John Mitchel believed that 'the project was in

42. Quoted in R. Piggott, *Personal Recollections of an Irish Nationalist Journalist* (Dublin, 1882), p. 131.

itself wild and could only be made to appear feasible by systematic delusion and imposture.'[43]

The most notable aspect of the Fenians, however, was that their activities did not cease after the 1867 rising. Later in the year the IRB rescued two Fenian prisoners in Manchester. During the raid a policeman was killed. In November 1867 three IRB men, William Allen, Michael Larkin and Michael O'Brien, were hanged for their part in the raid. The execution of the 'Manchester Martyrs' produced a wave of sympathy throughout Ireland which did much to popularise the Fenians in the public imagination. The IRB struck again in England in December 1867 when a bomb intended to destroy the wall of Clerkenwell prison in London, to enable an IRB leader to escape, killed a dozen or so civilians. The incidents at Manchester and Clerkenwell produced widespread anxiety, 'Fenian Fever', throughout England. The main political effect, though, was to influence William Gladstone, who became Prime Minister in 1868, to introduce reforms in Ireland which included the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland in 1869, followed by the Land Act of 1870 which aimed to improve tenant rights.

Despite the continued activities of the IRB, there was a feeling that the idea of armed insurrection had burned itself out. Increasingly, a number of Fenians were attracted by the prospect of some form of co-operation with the Irish nationalist parliamentarians to press for reforms on the land. Falling agricultural commodity prices in the 1870s threatened to depress the peasant economy in Ireland; another famine was not out of the question. The impending economic crisis caused Fenians like Michael Davitt to reconsider traditional IRB attitudes to social and economic reform. Whereas the IRB had tended to steer clear of the reform issue, for fear that reforms would dilute pressure for full separation, those like Davitt felt

43. Quoted in R. Anderson, *Sidelights on the Home Rule Movement* (London, 1906), p. 68.

that action had to be taken to relieve the situation on the land. Furthermore, he believed that 'landordism was a British garrison which barred the way to nationalist independence.'[44] Therefore, if the landlord system could be undermined through reforms, then an important obstacle to self-determination would be removed. Essentially, these ideas represented a recrudescence of Lalor's theories some three decades earlier.

In October 1879, Michael Davitt founded the Land League. At its head was Charles Stewart Parnell, leader of the Irish nationalists at Westminster. The League's aims were to campaign for a reduction in rents, the prevention of evictions, and the eventual establishment of peasant proprietorship. The alliance of sections of the Fenian movement, constitutionalists and agrarian interests proved highly effective. The Land League opposed evictions by organising an embargo on evicted farms, while social ostracism was practised on those who took up tenancies on farms from which others had already been evicted. This was accompanied by a huge upsurge in agrarian violence and intimidation which the League publicly deplored but tacitly backed to increase pressure on the government.[45] As a result, the period between 1880 and 1882 was known as the Land War. Inside parliament Parnell and his colleagues lobbied for reform which produced the Land Act of April 1881. The Act provided the Irish tenantry with fair rents, security of tenure and freedom of sale. Parnell was gaoled when he refused to endorse the Act as he felt its provisions were inadequate. The huge increase in rural violence following his imprisonment discredited the government's coercionist policies and persuaded Gladstone to release Parnell and undertake further reforms like the abolition of rent arrears. Thus the Land War was brought to an end. Parnell derived great popularity from the concessions he had won from the government which he used to renew his party's demand for home rule.

44. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 86.
45. See T. Moody, *Davitt and the Irish Revolution, 1846-1882* (Oxford, 1981), pp. 438-442.

The mainstream IRB, meanwhile, sullenly accepted the involvement of individual members in the Land League but refused to sanction any official participation, seeing it as a distraction from the main task of getting rid of the British. The Fenians did raise their profile again in the 1880s with a prolonged bombing campaign in England. The campaign was initiated by the movement's American arm, the Clan-na-Gael. The bombings were carried out by two sets of bombers. One renegade team was led by the veteran IRB man Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa. The other team, officially sponsored by the Clan, was led by William Lomasney who was later to die while attempting to place a bomb underneath London Bridge in 1884. In the main, the bombers attacked targets like barracks and government offices. However, the motives and aims of the campaign were obscure and there is little evidence to suggest that it had any major political impact. By 1887 the bombings had petered out.

Still, the nineteenth century Fenians are highly significant because they were the first set of Irish revolutionaries who outlived their own initial military failures. Both the United Irishmen and Young Ireland had been killed off by defeat. The 1867 rising was a disastrous undertaking but it entered the future republican legend as another act of defiance on the road to independence. The IRB remained in existence after 1867, dedicated conspiricists, determined to overthrow British rule. The IRB's activities in this era, for example, the 'Manchester Martyrs' episode, did much to raise nationalist awareness amongst the Irish population at large. For all these reasons, it was the Fenians who really established the Irish republican tradition in name. Even so, in political terms, by the 1880s, the IRB had been thoroughly eclipsed by the Land League coalition and the way of the future appeared to lie through home rule within the United Kingdom and not revolutionary nationalist separatism.

Progress over home rule in the following years proved painfully slow. The first Home Rule Bill introduced by Gladstone in 1886 divided the Liberal party and failed to get through the House of Commons. In the ensuing election caused by the crisis, the Liberals were defeated by the Conservative party. The Liberals returned to power in 1892 and introduced the second Home Rule Bill in 1893. This time the Bill passed in the Commons but was rejected by the Conservative dominated House of Lords. In the intervening period the Irish Parliamentary Party also went through a damaging split when in 1890 Parnell was named in divorce proceedings. This caused a bitter division between those who backed Parnell and those who deserted him out of fear of alienating both the Catholic Church (which came out strongly against Parnell) and the more socially conservative elements in the Liberal party whose support was necessary to pass any home rule legislation. The matter largely resolved itself in favour of the anti-Parnellites when Parnell himself died in 1891.

Despite the frustrations over home rule there was little pressure for any reassertion of violent nationalism. The IRB was, at this stage, a moribund, directionless organisation. It remained rhetorically committed to physical force but was passive in the face of the still dominant Irish Parliamentary Party. What did change the picture in the late nineteenth century was a remarkable upsurge in cultural awareness in Ireland generated by the prospect of self-determination under home rule. In 1884 the Gaelic Athletic Association was formed to revive and promote Irish games like Gaelic football and hurling. Later in 1893 the Gaelic League was established to revitalise Irish language and culture. This was accompanied by a renaissance in Anglo-Irish literature, led by people like W.B. Yeats, who drew on the romantic images of Celtic folklore for their writings which often

promulgated an idealised view of traditional Irish life and culture.[46] The success of the Gaelic revival inevitably had political effects as nationalist sentiments were rekindled. An avowedly separatist political party, Sinn Fein, was formed in 1907. Its leader, Arthur Griffith, advocated that Irish representatives should abstain from Westminster and establish their own assembly in Ireland, though he was also prepared to envisage some continuing titular role for the monarchy. It was also during this period, around 1907, that the IRB was reorganised and reinvigorated, under the tutelage of the veteran Fenian Tom Clarke, which placed the movement in a good position to exploit the fluidity of events in the following years.

By 1910, with the Irish Parliamentary Party supporting the Liberals in office, home rule was back on the agenda. The third Home Rule Bill was passed by the Commons, and though the Lords delayed the Bill they no longer had the power to block it. The prospect of home rule caused a surge of unrest in Ulster where many Protestants felt they were being abandoned to the clutches of a Catholic dominated legislature. Protestant insecurity had undoubtedly been heightened by the Gaelic revival which had closely identified Irish nationality with a Gaelic/Catholic cultural tradition. Protestants threatened to resist the imposition of home rule by setting up the paramilitary Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) in 1912. This was countered in November 1913 with the establishment of the Irish Volunteers which sought to pressurise the government to resist the threats of the UVF.

The outbreak of the First World War seemed to avert the impending crisis by postponing the implementation of home rule. To prove its loyalty to the crown the UVF joined the British Army. The Irish Volunteers, however, split over its attitude to the war. The majority of its 170,000 members followed the call of the Irish Parliamentary leader, John Redmond,

46. See N. Mansergh, *The Irish Question, 1840-1921* (London, 1965), pp. 245-267.

to enlist in the British Army. This left a faction of about 15,000 Volunteers, under their original leader, Eoin MacNeill, opposed to any involvement in the war. It was MacNeill's intention to use the anti-war Volunteers to keep up the pressure on the British government to live up to its obligations over home rule. The IRB, which had infiltrated the Volunteers, had altogether different plans for the organisation. The advent of war offered the IRB an opportunity to mount a rising while Britain was distracted by its continental entanglements. In the summer of 1915 the IRB created a small committee, later known as the Military Council, to make plans for a rising. So secretive was the work of the Council that by Easter 1916 it had itself become largely autonomous of IRB control: a conspiracy within a conspiracy.[47]

The IRB Military Council was composed of people like Patrick Pearse, himself a writer and poet, who was strongly imbued with the romantic imagery of the Gaelic revival which held out the vision of a thriving, civilised, self-sufficient nation untainted by foreign influence.[48] Pearse regarded war and weapons as a noble and virtuous symbol of manhood and nationhood. He was impressed by the formation of the UVF. 'I am glad that the Orangemen have armed for it is a goodly thing to see arms in Irish hands,' he said, 'I would like to see any and every body of Irish citizens armed.'[49] Above all, Pearse and his colleagues believed in the redemptive power of blood sacrifice; the idea that a gallant military stand could be spiritually regenerating, capable of lifting the Irish people out of the complacent lethargy into which they were deemed to have fallen. In 1914 Pearse's co-conspiritor, Sean MacDermott, expressed this feeling in the following way:

47. See O'Hegarty, pp. 696-699.
48. See J. Lee, *The Modernisation of Irish Society, 1848-1918* (Dublin, 1973), pp. 147-148.
49. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 144.

> Nationalism as known to Tone and Emmet is almost dead in the country and a spurious substitute, as taught by the Irish Parliamentary Party, exists ...the Irish patriotic spirit will die forever unless a blood sacrifice is made in the next few years... and it will be necessary for some of us to offer ourselves as martyrs if nothing better can be done to preserve the Irish national spirit...[50]

Also drawn into the IRB's conspiracy was the republican socialist, James Connolly, who was at the head of the Irish Citizen Army (ICA), a small organisation of some 200 members, founded in 1913 to train and discipline the workers and defend them in industrial disputes. He was convinced that national liberation was a pre-requisite for social revolution but was initially sceptical towards the IRB. He was especially disparaging about republican martyrology, arguing that 'they should stop blethering about dead Fenians' and 'get a few live ones for a change'.[51] However, Connolly became disillusioned at the failure of European socialists to oppose World War One and at the enthusiasm many Irishmen had shown for the British cause in the war. Connolly publicly called for a rebellion and was co-opted onto the Military Council. By early 1916 he was convinced of the need for a violent gesture. He believed that only 'the red tide of war on Irish soil' could raise Ireland out of its 'sense of degradation', adding that 'without the shedding of blood there is no Redemption.'[52]

So it was that the IRB and the ICA conspired in unison. Pearse, in his capacity as Director of Organisation of the Volunteers, lured the organisation into rebellion under the guise of general manoeuvres on Easter Sunday 1916. When MacNeill got wind that the manoeuvres were for an insurrection, he countermanded the mobilisation, with the result that only 1000 Volunteers turned out. The rebels held out for a week in the centre of Dublin before surrendering. In the following weeks, all the captured rebel leaders,

50. Quoted in Boyce, *Nationalism in Ireland*, p. 308.
51. Quoted in M. Wall, 'The Background to the Rising: From 1914 Until the Issue of the Countermanding Order on Easter Sunday 1916', in K. Nowlan (ed.), *The Making of 1916* (Dublin, 1969), p. 174.
52. Quoted in C. Greaves, *The Life and Times of James Connolly* (London, 1961), pp. 318-319.

including Pearse and Connolly, were executed.

It was from these antecedents, from Wolfe Tone to 1916, that the republican tradition became established in the public consciousness. It was a tradition which inculcated in its followers a deep mystical love of an Ireland free from outside interference. The republican ethos saw the procession of nationalist uprisings in pursuit of Irish independence not as military failures but as symbolic acts of defiance, spiritually renewing, and capable of inspiring others.[53] It was a sentiment encapsulated by Patrick Pearse at his court-martial on 2 May 1916, shortly before his execution, when he said: 'To refuse to fight would have been to lose, to fight is to win; we have kept faith with the past, and handed on a tradition to the future.'[54]

Although this section represents only a very general outline of the period between the 1790s and 1916, it has sought to identify both the various milestones in republican history and some of the key personalities involved. It is over this period that Chapter 1 seeks to discern a number of themes which have helped mould the way the republican movement thinks about the military instrument. The following chapters take this forward by examining the evolution of the military instrument in republican strategic thinking from 1916 onwards.

Of course, the 1916 Easter rising was the precursor to the monumental events of the Anglo-Irish war, the division of Ireland, the Irish civil war, all the way up to the present day troubles in Northern Ireland. Since this study is not an historical narrative it is obviously impossible to treat all the important events with the degree of attention they surely deserve in more general histories. Indeed, for this reason the thesis cannot range

53. See R. Kearney, *Narratives in Modern Irish Culture* (Dublin, 1988), pp. 212-216.
54. Quoted in J. Carty, *Ireland from the Great Famine to the Treaty, 1851-1921* (Dublin, 1951), p. 187.

over every facet of IRA activity. Because the material is, in the main, treated thematically within each chapter and specifically in relation to the development of the military instrument in republican strategic thinking, then inevitably the events chosen to elucidate the analysis are going to be somewhat selective. So, just for example, the text will not attempt to analyse, say, every single major IRA bombing or shooting which happened in the period covered by each chapter, but concentrate only on a number of key events which illustrate specific points of the argument. In this respect, it would be fair to say that some general knowledge of the course of Irish history is assumed. However, readers who wish to acquaint themselves with the main events of the period that this thesis covers may find it helpful to refer to the chronology in the appendices.

Terminology and Sources

Often the way names and places are expressed in the debate on the Irish question are imbued with much symbolic significance. Sometimes they are taken to indicate political preferences. While it is difficult to devise a completely neutral set of words, for the sake of clarity it is worth specifying how a number of terms will be used in the text. As a general rule, official place names will be used, though there will be a few variations. The term the 'Republic' will refer to the Republic of Ireland created after 1949. Before 1949 the 'South', as the Republic will sometimes be called, was known as the Irish Free State. Today, republicans frequently refer to the South as the 'Free State' or the 'twenty-six counties'. Northern Ireland will occasionally be referred to as the North or Ulster. Republicans and nationalists often dub Northern Ireland the 'six counties' or the 'North of Ireland'. The name Derry will be used to distinguish the city from the county of Londonderry.

In discussing the present conflict in Northern Ireland, the terms

Catholic and Protestant will be used in the manner outlined by Desmond Fennell to denote a politico-ethnic distinction between what he calls the Ulster-Irish and the Ulster-British.[55] In this way, Protestant and Catholic will be used inter-changeably with the respective descriptions nationalist and unionist/loyalist.

The breadth of the secondary material on Irish politics and history is enormous and can defy the imagination. The bibliography at the back of the thesis is by no means exhaustive and can itself only convey a flavour of what is on offer to the reader. It would be impractical to attempt an all embracing survey of the literature here,[56] but it is worth briefly mentioning a number of works that have been helpful in this analysis. F.S.L. Lyons's, *Ireland Since the Famine* (1971) is one of the stalwart histories. An immensely detailed and scholarly work, Lyons provides a lucid and well rounded descriptive introduction to modern Irish history. P.S. O'Hegarty has also written a detailed and useful work, *A History of Ireland Under the Union, 1801-1922* (1952). O'Hegarty concentrates on quoting long tracts from nationalist newspapers like *The Nation*, *The United Irishman* and *The Irish People*. Although the scope is narrow and partial, this approach enables one to gain an appreciation of the intellectual development of nationalist thinking, particularly during the nineteenth century, via the printed word. One of the most rewarding historical assessments is Nicholas Mansergh's *The Irish Question, 1840-1921* (1965). Not only does Mansergh offer a balanced, well-argued narrative, but he also devotes chapters to themes like the communist attitude to the Irish question and the influence of Gaelic romanticism in Irish politics, all of which help to consolidate background knowledge.

55. D. Fennell, *The State of the Nation* (Dublin, 1983), pp. 105-109.
56. For an excellent literature survey see T. Moody (ed.), *Irish Historiography, 1936-1970* (Dublin, 1971). H. Mulvey's contributions on nineteenth and twentieth century historiography (pp. 71-136) are especially recommended.

Sean Cronin's *Irish Nationalism* (1980) gives a basic but solid account of the history of Irish nationalism. D.G. Boyce, with his *Nationalism in Ireland* (1982), provides a more analytical study of the subject which focuses a bit more on the ideation of nationalism as a theoretical concept and its evolution in practice in Ireland through the years. If one has to single out one particular work in this field, however, it would be Robert Kee's *The Green Flag* (1972). It is thoroughly researched, fluidly written, critical but sensitive to the motives of all sides concerned. Kee's service is to put Irish nationalism into historical perspective by showing that, for the most part, physical force separatism was a minority pastime which only gained moral ascendancy after 1916, and that the struggle for independence between 1919 and 1921 was, for most people, less a crusade for the mystical republican vision, more a final, exasperated attempt to achieve a measure of national self-expression so long suppressed and denied. Perhaps the only pity with Kee's book is that it does not extend its clear-sighted and dispassionate analysis beyond the Irish civil war of 1922-1923.

There are still only two general histories of the IRA, Tim Pat Coogan's *The IRA* (1987) and J. Bowyer Bell's, *The Secret Army* (1989). Both are weighty volumes. Coogan is lively, opinionated and excellent in recounting the reminiscences of IRA members. The emphasis on personalities and its mixture of anecdotes and opinion, and lack of sourced material, can make the book seem rather unstructured at times. Even so, written by a journalist who is obviously passionately committed to the principle of a united Ireland, *The IRA* is required reading for those who wish to understand the republican-nationalist perspective. Of particular interest is an examination of the Provisional IRA's standard training manual, the *Green Book*, contained in the appendices. With Coogan's informative commentary this has been especially valuable to the analysis in Chapter 6.

With Bowyer Bell, the IRA receives more academic treatment. Like Coogan, the text is based on numerous interviews. The work is better sourced than Coogan and keeps firmly to the chronology from 1916 onwards. The account is more sober than Coogan, though Bowyer Bell is not incapable of literary flourish, and in this respect it is regarded as the standard work on the IRA, not least by the IRA itself. Some of Bell's work has even been reprinted in the movement's own journals.[57] The stamp of IRA approval does not compromise Bowyer Bell's work for *The Secret Army* is no IRA *apologia*.

The main weakness of *The IRA* and *The Secret Army*, for which neither author can be blamed, is that both books were first published in 1970 before the present IRA campaign really got under way. To keep pace with events this has necessitated the up-date of both books. In Coogan's case large tracts have been periodically tacked on in an unwieldy fashion with no attempt to tie the various strands of the analysis into an overall conclusion or summary, admittedly a difficult job when there is no end in sight to the conflict. Bowyer Bell's up-date to 1979, on the other hand, is just a quick spin through events which does not throw much light onto the motivations and intentions of the participants, or the implications of their actions. Coogan's and Bowyer Bell's greatest strength, though, lies earlier in time in the way their extensive interviews and researches illuminate the period from the 1920s to the 1960s which has, on the whole, received scant attention in the literature. They plot, often in fascinating detail, the descent of the IRA into a tiny military conspiracy while illustrating the strength of commitment to republican values that sustained the movement through these lean years. Yet both books demonstrate the problem inherent in all commentaries on the IRA, that they are prone to date rather rapidly. The result is that the best accounts of the IRA post-1969 are to be found elsewhere.

57. See J. Boywer Bell, 'Oglaigh Na h-Eireann [Irish Republican Army] - An Expert's View', *An Phoblacht*, 22 Feb. 1974.

Kevin Kelley follows the progress of the IRA up to the early 1980s in *The Longest War* (1982), though it is really a more general history of the conflict in Northern Ireland with a pronounced republican bias. Pat Bishop's and Eamonn Mallie's *The Provisional IRA* (1987) offers the most comprehensive history of the movement to date. The book is based largely on Mallie's interviews with current and past republican leaders and documents the history of the Provisionals from the movement's inception in 1969 to late 1986. Written more with mass consumption than academic rigour in mind, it nevertheless provides an illuminating insight into the Provisionals. One of the most interesting studies of recent years is Liam Clarke's *Broadening the Battlefield* (1987). Clarke gives a detailed account of the struggles inside the Maze prison (Long Kesh to republicans) for political status and how this led to a fundamental shift in republican political thinking which was to manifest itself in the emergence of Sinn Fein as a significant political force in Northern Ireland in the mid-1980s. Clarke charts the manoeuvrings of the younger republican leaders who were to steer through these changes and the friction this caused with the more conservative elements. Also, the appendices contain PIRA's 1977 *Staff Report* which set the course for the revisions in the movement's strategy in the years ahead. Clarke's study has been essential background reading for the final two chapters of the thesis. In relation to the events covered by Clarke, it is also worth mentioning Adrian Guelke's *Northern Ireland: The International Perspective* (1988). This is an important commentary in its own right, dealing with the internationalisation of the conflict as it does, but his chapter on 'Republican Perceptions' provides a concise and perspicacious overview of the changes in IRA policy over recent years.

For all that has been written on Irish affairs there is still relatively little sustained, in-depth analysis of the thinking which drives the IRA's

belief in violence as a viable political tool. Indeed, this lack of analysis applies to all political actors in the Irish context. Such writings still seem to be confined to single chapters which inevitably contain a high level of generality. However, Padraig O'Malley's chapter in his *The Uncivil Wars* (1983) is a thought provoking piece which examines the relationship between the IRA's armed struggle and the then emergent electoral policy of Sinn Fein. For the most part, O'Malley allows republican leaders to speak for themselves by quoting large oral segments with minimal intervening comment. In the latter half of the chapter he proceeds to dissect some of the ideological strands which underpin IRA violence In the process he constructs a damning critique which attacks both the IRA's mythological Gaelic exclusivism, with its consequent antagonistic, stereotypical view of Ulster Protestants as alien interlopers, and the ambiguity of Southern politicians whose constitutional claim on the North, he believes, continues to endow PIRA's campaign with a spurious quasi-legitimacy.

Arthur Aughey's section 'Political Violence in Northern Ireland' in H.H. Tucker (ed.), *Combating the Terrorists* (1988) affords a very short but informative synopsis of the strategy and tactics of the IRA. Aughey also outlines the aims of the loyalist paramilitaries and gives a brief assessment of the British government's political response to the crisis. Overall, though, it is true to say that the best contemporary commentaries on paramilitary strategies still tend to emanate from journalistic quarters in the writings of those like David McKittrick *(The Independent*, formally of *The Irish Times)* and Ed Moloney *(The Irish Times)*.

There are more general surveys on the issue of violence of which Charles Townshend's *Political Violence in Ireland* (1983) is a seminal study, being massively researched and rich in quotations from original sources. There is not much in the way of strategic analysis, though there are occas-

ional references to military theories and thinkers. For example, there is a brief allusion to terrorist theory and Whiteboy activities and odd comparisons between the development of republican military doctrine in the early twentieth century with various strands of Maoist thought. But Townshend does not purport to offer a comprehensive strategic evaluation. *Political Violence* is an historical review which aims to reflect the full experience of violence in Irish politics and society in all its variegated forms; nationalist, unionist, British, agrarian.

One of the most unusual offerings to have emerged on the present conflict is supplied by Martin Dillon and Denis Lehane in *Political Murder in Northern Ireland* (1973) which catalogues a series of sectarian killings in the province between 1966 and 1973. For all the grusomeness of the subject matter, it is an important work which helps explain the rise of the loyalist paramilitaries in the early 1970s. In this respect it has been of assistance in Chapter 5 which looks in part at the implications of the sectarian war for PIRA's strategy. On a not too dissimilar theme, Dillon's latest book, *The Dirty War* (1988), examines the secret world of informers, intelligence gathering, paramilitary racketeering, unsolved murders, allegations of collusion between the security forces and loyalist gangs, and other contentious issues. It is an intriguing study. Dillon's treatment of his material is especially impressive as he never stretches evidence farther than it will allow. Therefore, rather than succumbing to the temptation to indulge in unfounded conspiracy theory, Dillon prefers to admit that his investigations often leave even more questions than answers. Perhaps the most valuable service which both *Political Murder* and *The Dirty War* genuinely perform is to constantly remind the reader what the basic form of the conflict usually takes; squalid acts of incredible brutality. It is something

which all observers who seek to analyse events in the glacial terminology of academia, strategists especially, would be wise never to forget.

Possibly the most striking feature of the literature on the republican movement over the past twenty years is the scarcity of memoirs of individual members. There are obvious reasons for this. The IRA is a secretive organisation whose members do not spill out their reminiscences out of deference to their rebel vocation and to protect those still involved. Also, the more public figures in Provisional Sinn Fein (PSF) have in their careers often traversed a line between the legal and illegal and so feel restricted in what they can reveal. Gerry Adams, the current president of PSF, and a prolific writer, is a case in point. His *Falls Memories* (1982) tell of his childhood growing up in West Belfast. *A Pathway to Peace* (1988) is a political tract. *The Politics of Irish Freedom* (1986) is part memoir, part political tract in which Adams describes how he became involved in republican politics and is an excellent exposition of the contemporary republican outlook. Yet none of these reveal anything of his time within the ranks of the Provisional IRA during which he rose to become the organisation's Belfast commander, and later, allegedly, its chief of staff.

The two most notable reminiscences which have appeared over the years are those of Maria McGuire and Sean MacStiofain. McGuire's *To Take Arms* (1973) is a racey account of her involvement with the movement between 1971 and 1972. The book contains many defects. The title itself is misleading since it is evident that McGuire never saw any combat with PIRA. Further, her status within the movement was obscure. It is unclear whether she was a member of PIRA or PSF, as is the extent to which she had access to the top echelons of the Provisionals. Also, a large part of her statement is taken up with retelling her travails in a bungled arms smuggling operation in Amsterdam - an insignificant episode if ever there was one. Fundament-

ally, McGuire was not representative of typical IRA material. She was a young woman graduate from a well-to-do background, rather naively attracted into the movement by what she believed at the time was its radical chic. Nevertheless, McGuire writes well and she is strong in the latter part of her account when she describes the internal machinations which were to eventually lead her to desert the movement when the bloody effects of PIRA's campaign became too much.

By contrast, MacStiofain's *Memoirs of a Revolutionary* (1975) is the somewhat dour testimony of PIRA's first chief of staff. MacStiofain concentrates on the bare historical mechanics. Utterly unreflective, with no hint of any kind of introspection which might have allowed himself to probe his own motivations for the reader's edification, these are the memoirs of someone convinced of the righteousness of his cause. Precious little is said about strategic debates or any sort of policy discussions within PIRA's Army Council, and on the whole, he does not say much which was not already known. Even so, MacStiofain does occasionally enlighten some of the key phases in republican history. In particular, he is at his best recounting the factionalism which developed after the end of the IRA's unsuccessful border war in 1962 - a process which was eventually to lead in 1969 to the split in republican ranks and the formation of PIRA. In summary, for all their deficiencies, both MacStiofain and McGuire are highly instructive reading. Both works are flawed. But both are vitally important, precisely because they are the only detailed accounts we have of life within IRA circles. MacStiofain's memoirs are highly pertinent to the 1960s and early 1970s and McGuire's testimony is central in helping to comprehend PIRA's actions at one of the most crucial points of its history in mid-1972.

Another aspect of the literature on Ireland is that there are still few studies which deal with specific issues within Irish republican ideology.

One recent exception is Henry Patterson's *The Politics of Illusion* (1989) which traces the history of socialist republican thinking. The book is important if one hopes to understand the cycles in republican activity because on a number of occasions, usually after military failure, the movement, or at least factions of it, have articulated a socialist path as a means, Patterson says, to keep alive the republican tradition by recasting militant nationalism within what was hoped would be a more popular socio-economic framework. Because social revolutionary programmes are often highly conscious of the correlation of ends and means, great thought is usually given to the individual components of such projects. In this regard Patterson provides a particularly good discussion on the controversial revision of the armed struggle which took place in republican thinking when a more overtly socialist course was adopted in the 1960s.

There are, of course, many other erudite articles and chapters which do pursue precise themes within the ambit of republicanism and political violence. For example, Frank Burton's chapter 'Republicanism: The IRA and the Community', in his *The Politics of Legitimacy* (1978) takes the reader to street level to understand the sometimes tense but often mutually supportive relationship between the IRA and the nationalist population of Belfast during the early 1970s. Alternatively, the series of books edited by Yonah Alexander and Alan O'Day (*Terrorism in Ireland* (1984), *Ireland's Terrorist Dilemma* (1986), *Ireland's Terrorist Trauma* (1989)), contain many diverse contributions on the conflict from 'Political Assassination in the Irish Tradition' (1984) by Tom Corfe, to the treatment of Northern Ireland by political cartoonists - 'English Cartoonists; Ulster Realities' (1986) by John Kirklady. J. Bowyer Bell also brings together an interesting but disparate collection of his own essays on violence in Ireland, *The Gun in Politics*

(1987); a veritable literary tapestry of his ruminations over many years, but something which does not add up to a coherent picture of the subject.

This thesis has also been aided by a number of compilations of documents and statistics. For example, the statistics on the conflict in Northern Ireland published by the Irish Information Partnership have been invaluable. Arthur Mitchell and Padraig O'Snodaigh bring together a compendium of original documentary material in *Irish Political Documents, 1916-1949* (1985) which has proved very useful for Chapters 2 and 3. In addition, W.D. Flackes' editions of *Northern Ireland: A Political Directory* (the latest of which is the 1989 edition with Sydney Elliott), have been an indispensable source of factual information.

Overall, opinions differ on how well Ireland has been covered by contemporary writers. J. Bowyer Bell, in his own assessment of the literature, thinks that on the whole it has been poorly served over the years, with much that is indescribably awful.[58] That there exists second and third rate material is undeniable. However, the truth is probably that Ireland has been well served by writers and analysts. The problem is that so much has been produced, and continues to issue forth from all directions, that good work does not immediately advertise itself. The profusion of information, therefore, makes it difficult to sort out the worthy from the bland, the partisan, the repetitive and the superficial. Consequentially, so much of what can be considered good often comes down to a matter of personal interest and taste. This section has attempted to at least highlight some of the relevant works in the area but, in so doing, also to identify a gap in the literature in relation to the lack of any systematic strategic analysis of the Irish republican movement. J. Bowyer Bell, himself has drawn attention to the general absence of 'solid... strategical analysis.'[59] Such an

58. J. Bowyer Bell, *The Gun in Politics* (New York, 1987), p. 264 and p. 319.
59. J. Bowyer Bell, *The Secret Army: The IRA, 1916-1979* (Dublin, 1989), p. 459.

omission is a surprising feature of a subject which has generated an abundant and diverse anthology. This thesis attempts to make a contribution to this understudied area.

The originality of this thesis, therefore, lies in its method of approach which seeks to use strategic theory to chart the way the Irish republican movement has thought about the employment of violence for political purposes. In a broad conceptual sense, it is hoped that this research will help contribute to the formulation of a more novel theoretical framework in which to examine other low intensity conflicts. This dimension has been very much neglected within the discipline of strategic studies as theoretical work has tended to focus almost exclusively on nuclear politics and limited conventional war scenarios. By relating 'classical' concepts of strategic theory to a single case study of low intensity warfare, the thesis should provide a new angle within the discipline and maybe encourage further theoretical exploration in this field. More specifically, the research will shed light onto the Irish republican strategic ethos which should enhance our understanding of how the movement conceives the utility of the military instrument. Such an appreciation may even help to provide some insight into why the IRA behaves in the manner it does.

Important though the secondary sources are for consolidating background knowledge, the bulk of this study is based on primary material. The numerous publications produced by the Irish republican movement provides the main source of primary information for this research. This material is supplemented by a review of the Irish, British and international press. This thesis is not based on interviews. During a research trip to Northern Ireland in the summer of 1989 many of those involved in the political and security affairs of the province were interviewed as a matter of routine. Only a series of meetings with a leading member of PSF were considered to

be of sufficient direct relevance to warrant inclusion. Because the vast majority of primary data was gathered during the summer research trip the analysis does not extend much beyond autumn 1989. Therefore, this thesis stands as a record of the republican movement's strategic thinking up to, at most, the early months of 1990.

J. Bowyer Bell has written lucidly on the problems facing students of Irish republican history in gaining accurate information on the subject.[60] The IRA is an army on the run. On the military side there is no such thing as any collection of records and documents. The little that has been committed to paper has often been either lost, seized or destroyed. The republican press is useful though offers only a partial insight. Little of substance is mentioned on the IRA and, as Bowyer Bell says, 'divisions over policy and personality are argued out of print if at all possible.'[61] As a consequence, it is impossible for anyone not privy to the movement's internal machinations to write as if they were looking over the shoulders of the IRA's Army Council.

In spite of these complications, headway can be made. John Garnett has commented that it is impossible to know all the facts as they relate to any particular question, such is the preserve only of an omniscient god. In any case, he says, students do not really deal in facts as such, so much as available evidence.[62] So while this analysis will always try where possible to get behind the military rhetoric, the intention is also to take the Irish republican movement at its word and to assess its pronouncements, with reference to strategic theory, to see how they stand up under sustained scrutiny.

There is no doubt, however, that we are still left with a very incomplete picture. This is why emphasis has been placed on viewing the

60. Boywer Bell, *The Secret Army*, p. 454.
61. *Ibid.*, pp. 447-463.
62. Garnett, *Commonsense and the Theory of International Politics*, p. 105.

republican movement's utilisation of the military instrument through an evolutionary perspective. On this background, one can attempt to trace lines of continuity and build up an impression of the process of republican strategic formulation. Nevertheless, it is difficult to appreciate the full impact of all the socio-historical factors which may consciously or unconsciously influence the IRA's behaviour. It is rather like the puppet and the puppeteer. We know there must be other guiding hands which govern the puppet's movements. Yet all we can see is the puppet. Therefore, metaphorically speaking, we can only attempt to analyse what the puppet itself thinks it is doing.

CHAPTER 1

THEMES IN IRISH REPUBLICAN MILITARY THOUGHT - THE EVOLUTION OF A STRATEGIC TRADITION

Although strategic theory is premised on the assumption of the use of military power as a rational instrument of policy, it would be quite erroneous to judge any political group by some absolute formula of rationality. No group could be expected to conform to such a formula as ideological and cultural biases would inevitably dislodge political activity from any narrow and fixed concept of rationality.

Strategy does not exist in the domain of pure reason, clear insight and certitude of calculation. It was Clausewitz who emphasised that in military matters passions and chance rule just as much as careful, pre-meditated action. Strategic theory must, therefore, always strive to take account of the human factor because: 'The art of war deals with living and with moral forces. Consequently, it cannot attain the absolute, or certainty; it must always leave a margin for uncertainty, in the greatest things as much as the smallest.'[1] It is consideration of the more intangible factors that condition the application of force which makes strategy a vibrant and worthwhile subject to study rather than an obscure exercise in hypotheticals. Indeed, trying to ascertain how a group's image of reality affects the kinds of decisions it takes is one of the key elements in strategic analysis. In this way, strategic theory should not be seen as incompatible with ideology. In fact they are complementary. An ideology represents that core of motivational beliefs which seeks to move a group towards certain ends while strategy constitutes the exploitation of available means to reach those ends. If there were no ideologies then presumably there would be no requirement for political change, and consequently, no need for the formulation of any strategies. What is of interest to strategists, and will be a major concern

1. Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 86.

of this study, is the extent to which ideological symbolism may interfere unduly with the decision making process, but as mentioned in the introduction, this does not lead to the automatic presumption of irrationality.

To reiterate, strategy is not something to be pursued along the path of narrow theory against which all political behaviour of combatants is to be tested. Again, as Clausewitz noted, there is no such thing as a strict theory of warfare. All we have in the real world are *'laws of probability'*[2] - a set of strategic norms. In this sense, as Garnett says, strategic analysis develops along two levels. On one level strategists look at strategic norms to demonstrate the logic of certain actions based on the sober, conscious calculation of self-interest. On the other level, strategists must examine *strategic decision makers* in all their complexity, taking into account those factors which may impose themselves on the actor and influence his conduct.[3]

An appreciation of the ideological parameters which underpin the development of a political actor's decision making is especially important with regard to a situation where a strategy has evolved organically, unlike, say, theories of deterrence or *blitzkrieg*, which are largely moulded and regulated by stark technological limitations. Irish republican strategy, as in any guerrilla war scenario, is a product of its native land and people. It is, therefore, unique in its location, scope and history, and it evolves in accord with these unique characteristics.

Of course, the true origins of republican strategic thinking stretch back to the outer reaches of Irish history, and arguably even to mythic prehistory. It is impossible to do justice to even a fraction of the republican movement's rich historical inheritance in the space available here. So, the intention of this chapter is to analyse schematically the evolution

2. *Ibid.*, p. 80.
3. Garnett, 'Strategic Studies and its Assumptions', in Baylis, *et al*, p. 19.

of a number of ideological themes within the republican tradition which have a bearing upon the employment of the military instrument. This chapter will hope to indicate how these ideological precepts have been sustained since the late eighteenth century and how they continue to exert themselves on contemporary republican thinking. Needless to say, the themes to be examined do not represent all of the characteristics of the republican tradition. Also, to an extent, the themes are inter-related, so separating them out under individual headings is a somewhat artificial process. Nevertheless, by this method one may be able to distil a distinct pattern of republican strategic formulation. The themes to be examined will be, in order, the republican movement's characterisation of Ireland's relationship with Britain; elitism and the concept of generational revolt in the republican tradition; republican perceptions of the functionality of violence; doctrinal absolutism in republican ideology; and finally, the republican analysis of the nature of loyalism.

As the historical outline in the introduction indicated, the modern republican movement draws its inspiration from a tradition of conspiracy which centres on a number of rebellions, most notably the revolts of the United Irishmen in 1798, the Young Irelanders in 1848, the Fenians in 1867 and, probably most importantly, the Easter Rising of 1916. Although the movement claims this heritage of revolt to represent a direct line of succession with the modern era, it would be wrong to speak in terms of a clearly defined republican strategic legacy. For example, it is doubtful whether those like the United Irishmen or the Young Irelanders ever considered themselves republicans in any meaningful sense of the term as we might understand it today. As is so often the case, interpretations of history are used to support political positions in the present.[4] Indeed, this is the process in which we are interested for the purposes of this

4. See P. Gibbon, 'Orange and Green Myths', *Fortnight* Aug. 1972.

chapter. We are not concerned here with the exact nature of the events as they unfolded but with perceptions of the past and the effects they have on the republican movement's strategic analysis.

The Relationship with Britain - The Colonial Analysis

'British soldiers and British administrators have never brought anything but death, suffering, starvation and untold misery to the people in this country. They will never bring anything else until they get out'.[5] These sentiments expressed in one small PSF publication in the 1970s encapsulate the emotional core of republicanism. Wolfe Tone, one of the figures in the rebellion of the United Irishmen in 1798 and hailed in the modern era as the founding father of the republican tradition, declared: 'From my earliest youth I have regarded the connection between Ireland and England as the curse of the Irish nation.'[6] Consequently, from this assumption, Tone is said to have concluded that England was the 'party solely responsible for all the ills afflicting Ireland'.[7] It is the root rejection of British, or more particularly English, influence in Ireland which remains the most distinguishing feature of republican thinking. Why should this be so? To comprehend republican practice of the military instrument it is necessary to understand the reason for this perception as the answer provides the intellectual basis upon which the movement has sought to define relevant strategies.

The republican view of the relationship between Ireland and Britain was forcefully stated by Provisional Sinn Fein (PSF) in 1988 during a series of meetings held with the main constitutional nationalist party in Northern Ireland, the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP). 'British interference in Ireland', PSF claimed, 'has and continues to be malign because its

5. *Eire Nua* (PSF news sheet, n.p.), Jan. 1977.
6. Quoted in G. Adams, *A Pathway to Peace* (Cork, 1988), p. 48.
7. S.O.D., 'Wolfe Tone and Today', *The United Irishman (UI)* June 1949.

presence has and continues to be based on its own self-interests.'[8] The history of British involvement in Irish affairs is seen in terms of Britain's attempts to use its power systematically to drain Ireland of its human and material resources through under-development, restricted markets, famine and emigration, and the imposition of alien institutions. The present situation in Northern Ireland is deemed to play a key role in Britain's continuing imperial design. Republicans see the province's existence as an artificially manufactured political arrangement to preserve British domination of the whole island. One republican writer has compared it to a robber, who, having broken into someone's home and 'while leering at the householder, he tells you, look get on with your own business, I am occupying only one room.'[9] In this way, republicans allege that the British presence distracts and divides the people and disfigures all aspects of political and social life in Ireland. It prevents the emergence of a mature class-based polity, retards economic progress and distorts social and cultural values, thereby leaving the British in the North, and their neo-colonial business allies in the South, to carry on making their mint out of the exploitation of the Irish people.'[10]

The notion of colonial subjugation is one of the strongest themes in Irish nationalism. The contention that Ireland remains at the mercy of an exploitative foreign power, with all the attendant suffering which it causes, forms the central hypothesis of republican political analysis. In Tone's opinion, the 'bane of Irish prosperity is the influence of England.' 'I believe', Tone went on, 'that influence will be ever extended while the connection between the countries continues.'[11] It was this impression of the

8. G. Adams, *Towards a Strategy for Peace*, Letter to J. Hume (PSF Document No. 1, PSF-SDLP Talks), 14 March 1988, p. 1.
9. J. Hope 'Why England Occupies Ireland', *An Phoblacht (AP)*, 5 April 1978.
10. Adams, *A Pathway to Peace*, p. 10 and pp. 32-33.
11. Quoted in J. Froude, *The English in Ireland in the Eighteenth Century*, Vol. III (London, 1895), p. 18.

fixed nature of British interests in Ireland that convinced the United Irishmen that they could never be masters of their own destiny. The movement's 1797 constitution proclaimed: 'We have no National Government; we are ruled by Englishmen and the Servants of Englishmen, whose Object is the Interest of another country, whose Instrument is corruption and whose Strength is the Weakness of Ireland'.[12]

The republican diagnosis of Ireland's predicament was straightforward. Echoing the words of Tone, an article in the republican newspaper, *An Phoblacht*, proclaimed that 'Ireland would never be free, prosperous or happy until she was independent and that independence was unattainable while the connection with England lasted.'[13] The consequent belief that the British have no moral right to govern, or have any influence in Ireland provides the basis of republican strategic thought as it helps to define both the political object to be gained and the military goal with which to achieve it. The political object as described by Tone was 'to break the connection with England, the never failing source of all our political evils and to assert the independence of my country.'[14] The demand for independence only became entrenched in republican philosophy after the emergence in the mid-nineteenth century of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, also known as the Fenians. The IRB was established by a small group of nationalists to co-ordinate conspiritorial efforts in Ireland. Unlike the United Irishmen and the Young Irelanders before them, who had initially tried to work within the constitutional process but had felt pushed into rebellion as an act of desperation, the IRB from the outset repudiated British rule and dedicated itself to conspire against Britain as a first resort.'[15] Since the time of

12. The Constitution of the United Irishmen (1797) in C. Carlton (ed.), *Bigotry and Blood: Documents on the Ulster Troubles* (Chicago, 1977), p. 46.
13. Quoted in J. Brennan, 'The Philosophy of Tone', *AP*, 18 June 1932.
14. Quoted in MacAonghusa and O'Reagain, *The Best of Wolfe Tone*, p. 46.
15. Carty, *Ireland from the Great Famine to the Treaty, 1851-1921*, p. 30.

the Fenians the aim of complete British disengagement from Ireland has remained the foremost goal of the republican movement. In the view of the present president of PSF, Gerry Adams, 'British withdrawal is a necessary pre-condition if we are to secure the basis upon which peace can be built in Ireland.'[16]

The military objective by which Irish republican violence would seek to expel the British is an altogether more problematic affair. The radical thinker of the nineteenth century and associate of the Young Ireland movement, James Fintan Lalor, summed up the military position at the time, thus:

> In the case of Ireland now there is but one *fact* to deal with, and *one question* to be considered. The *fact* is this - that there are at present in occupation of our country some 40,000 armed men in the livery and service of England; and the *question* is - how best and soonest to kill and capture those 40,000 men.'[17]

Part of the answer as to how and where to apply violence in republican strategy was supplied by the conciseness of the movement's analysis in clearly identifying the enemy. 'British imperialism' is cast as the general shape of the threat to Ireland'[18] and the British government, as the main regulator of imperial policy, as the central authority to be coerced. Daithi O'Conaill, a founder member of the Provisional IRA, made this point explicit in 1974 when he declared that 'the British Government... hold[s] the key to peace and war.'[19] The clear belief of such a statement was that attacks on the symbols and structures of British authority would be able to alter governmental attitudes towards Ireland.

By the late nineteenth century a pattern of republican-nationalist military activity was beginning to emerge in a form which in certain ways would be recognisable today. For instance, one of the first major acts of political assassination was carried out in May 1882 by a group calling

16. G. Adams, *The Politics of Irish Freedom* (Dingle, Co. Kerry, 1986), p. 165.
17. Quoted in P. Pearse, *Ghosts* (1912), Part VII, reprinted in *AP*, 1 Oct. 1926.
18. See *Republican News (RN)*, 16 Feb. 1973.
19. 'Daithi O'Conaill Television Interview', *RN*, 30 Nov. 1974.

itself the Invincibles when they murdered the Secretary of State for Ireland, Lord Frederick Cavendish and his Under-Secretary, T.H. Burke, in Phoenix Park in Dublin. The motives for the murders remain obscure and similar acts were not repeated for many years. The Invincibles were a shadowy nationalist grouping, seemingly comprised of ex-Fenians but whose immediate political origins appeared to reside more in the land agitation campaigns of the time.[20] However, some years afterwards one minor figure in the Invincible conspiracy, P.J.P. Tynan, explained the rationale for the murders as the 'removal' of those who upheld Britain's illegal and alien administration' and described political assassination as a 'species of guerrilla warfare' to be employed so that 'these ferocious offices should be kept vacant by the continual suppression of their holders.'[21]

Besides the Phoenix Park murders, the 1880s saw the outbreak of Fenian dynamiting campaigns in England. The bombings began in January 1881 and concentrated mainly on targets like military barracks and public offices. The Byzantine nature of republican politics of the time makes it difficult to fathom the precise purpose of the bombings as they were undertaken by rival factions of the American arm of the Fenian movement, the Clan-na-Gael, though the original intention was apparently to distract Britain from a general insurrection in Ireland.[22] The bombings continued intermittently with little effect until 1887. Nevertheless, the depiction of British colonialism as the main adversary in Ireland's fight for independence had been pressed to its logical military end. Along with the assassination of important figures in the British establishment, 'bringing the struggle to the enemy's backyard',[23] was to become a mainstay in republican military

20. See L. O'Broin, *Revolutionary Underground* (Dublin, 1976), pp. 27-29. and T. Corfe, *The Phoenix Park Murders* (London, 1968), pp. 135-136.
21. Source: P. Tynan, *The Irish Invincibles and Their Times* (London, 1894), p. 430, cited in T. Corfe, 'Political Assassination in the Irish Tradition', in O'Day and Alexander, *Terrorism in Ireland*, p. 122.
22. See M. Bourke, *John O'Leary* (Tralee, Co. Kerry, 1967), p. 145.
23. *RN*, 5 Feb. 1977.

doctrine as it was through these means that the movement could hope to gain the greatest influence over British policy.

The strength of republican analysis is that it presents a powerful and easily comprehensible argument. Yet its strength in this respect is also its main theoretical weakness. The image of complete British culpability risks promoting tunnel vision as it narrows the scope of republican analysis by excluding a multiplicity of other factors which might also have some bearing on the Irish context and affect strategic calculations accordingly. This may rigidify the analysis to a degree where it is itself elevated to a point of dogma,[24] and so create an unstable intellectual platform on which to base assessments of the value of military force. In the worst case, this can lead force to be applied out of blind hatred where violence is seen not in functional terms but purely as a means of striking a righteous blow against an enemy responsible for centuries of oppression. The main potential problem, as it concerns this study, is that the lack of a wider consideration of influences may make the process of strategic formulation inflexible and unself-critical, unable to take account of changing circumstances, thereby guiding and reinforcing other inaccurate or outmoded assumptions which may flow from a highly restrictive analysis.

The Nationalist Vanguard and Apostolic Succession

One obvious corollary of the republican movement's colonial analysis is the cultivation of an idealised alternative to the despoilations of British rule. Emphasis on asserting Ireland's cultural achievements has played a major part in the development of this theme in republican ideology. The Young Irelanders were significant in this respect as they believed that cultural rejuvenation was a pre-requisite to substantiate any claim for independence.

24. See D. O'Neil, *Three Perennial Themes of Anti-Colonialism: The Irish Case* (Denver, 1976), p. 112.

Through the promotion of Irish culture and history the movement sought to build a distinctive and integrated national identity.[25] In the pages of the Young Ireland newspaper, *The Nation*, under its editor and intellectual mentor of the movement, Thomas Davis, Ireland's claim to autonomy was advanced through its portrayals of a vigorous, self-reliant and disciplined cultural inheritance capable of resisting the corrupting values and oppression of foreign intervention. 'And now, Englishmen, listen to us!', Davis announced, 'We tell you, and all whom it may concern, come what may - bribery or deceit, justice, policy or war - we tell you, in the name of Ireland, Ireland shall be a Nation!'[26]

It was in the early years of the twentieth century, against the background of an upsurge of interest in Gaelic culture, that the concept of Irish nationality was further enhanced within the republican tradition through the writings of Patrick Pearse. Pearse's visions of nationhood reached quasi-religious proportions. He rejected the view that independence was something to be decided empirically in terms of economic viability, ethnic homogeneity, the consent of the imperial power and so on. The Irish nation he believed to be a mystical entity, a unified whole embracing all men and women in Ireland, something 'holy in itself.'[27] 'Freedom' in Pearse's view, was conceived as 'a spiritual necessity' which 'transcends all corporeal necessities'.[28]

There is no doubt that the belief in Ireland as a single political unit which can only attain 'true justice, peace and happiness'[29] with the overthrow of British rule remains an object of devotion within the modern republican movement. The intensity with which this goal is held has endowed

25. J. Hutchinson, *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism* (London, 1987), pp. 104-105.
26. Quoted in Pearse, *Ghosts*, Part VII.
27. P. Pearse, *Ghosts*, Parts I-III, reprinted in *AP*, 17 Sept. 1926.
28. *Ibid.*.
29. Adams, *The Politics of Irish Freedom*, p. 62 and see also p. 88.

republicans with a strong sense of conviction in the correctness of their motives and intentions. The impression is one of a nationalist vanguard that sees itself as the embodiment of the true spirit of Ireland's destiny.

Intellectual elitism was certainly a feature of the Young Irelanders. They saw their role as that of tutors to the masses in order, in Davis' words, to 'spiritualise and nationalise them with higher and nobler aims.'[30] Tom Garvin suggests that after the Irish civil war in 1923 this strand of moral elitism bred a particularly puritanical republican persona which saw the Irish people as a largely impassive mass who had been deflected from following the true path to freedom by British and Free State propaganda.[31] Such attitudes are detectable within republican rhetoric. For example, in 1926 the Sinn Fein leader, Eamon de Valera, expressed the hope that after the damage caused to republican unity by the civil war the movement 'would receive back all those of the rank and file who had been misled in the recent years.' He continued: 'Republicans must be prepared to recognise that error is a human failing and make the necessary allowances.'[32] In a similar vein, one republican advocate writing in the early 1970s reminded his readers that, as one of the 'minority revolutionary movements', republicans were 'fighting against conservative odds to keep the real needs and most urgent social and political problems before the people'.[33] Implicit in these sorts of statements is a disposition which regards the bulk of the people as rather guileless, capable of being manipulated and unable to determine their 'real needs'. Deviation from the republican line results not from differing perspectives and analyses but from 'human failing'. The debasement of those who do not follow the republican course

30. Quoted in E. Norman, *A History of Modern Ireland* (London, 1971), p. 123.
31. T. Garvin, *Nationalist Revolutionaries in Ireland, 1858-1928* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 149-157.
32. E. de Valera, 'The Work Before Ireland', *AP*, 15 Jan. 1926.
33. J. Bennett introduction to S. Cronin and R. Roche, *Freedom the Wolfe Tone Way* (Tralee, Co. Kerry, 1973), p. 67.

is enlightened only by the prospect that they will return to the fold having seen the futility of the alternatives and having finally recognised their own gullibility. In the recent past, the republican movement has had occasion to proclaim openly that the IRA 'has a monopoly on true Irish patriotism'.[34] This type of thinking underlines the fact that the movement's conception of the political arena is not one where men and women are invited to choose freely between competing ideas and visions through argument and debate, but is one characterised by a series of unmovable truths to which people should owe allegiance.

The effect of republican elitism on the employment of the military instrument has been to furnish the movement with a firm belief in the power of exemplary violence to awaken the nationalist consciousness of the Irish people. Explaining the motives for his involvement in the Fenian conspiracy, the IRB leader, James Stephens, wrote that 'if another decade was allowed to pass without an endeavour of some kind or another to shake off an unjust yoke, the Irish people would sink into a lethargy from which it would be impossible for any patriot to arouse them.'[35] The notion that a republican uprising could lift the people out of their apathy and goad them into action remained a pervasive theme in the movement's thought. Moreover, demonstrative action was seen as a method to crystallise public disaffection into a mass effort to overturn the *status quo*. Stephens' sentiments in this respect found their echo decades later in the twentieth century when it was suggested that the 'nationalist atmosphere needs a stimulus which will reinvigorate and free the hitherto muffled, thwarted and psychologically repressed youth of Ireland to play their part in the rebuilding of a new Ireland.'[36]

34. *AP/RN*, 18 Feb. 1982.
35. Quoted in Kee, *The Green Flag*, p. 306.
36. S.O.D., 'Wolfe Tone and Today'.

Evidence of the influence of the nationalist vanguard on the use of force is discernable in the republican tradition of attempted rebellions. All of them, to some degree, were premised on the hope that local risings would encourage a mass revolt. The rebellion of the United Irishmen of May 1798, though reliant on French intervention, was equally dependent on a countrywide uprising. Only in Wexford were a significant number of rebels prepared to rise up along with two smaller risings in Ulster, but by early July these had been suppressed. The tiny conspiracy led by Robert Emmet in 1803, had hoped to excite the population through the seizure of Dublin Castle, the seat of British government in Ireland, but it failed in this objective and collapsed immediately. Neither did many feel willing or able to follow the rebellions of the Young Irelanders in 1848 or the Fenians in 1867, both of which were put down in a matter of days.

That these risings failed to incite popular revolt emphasised the fact that they were the work of a conspiritorial elite, not that military defeat acted as any kind of deterrent for a determined minority. As the Fenian John O'Leary argued, it was 'ridiculous' to believe 'that if any people fail to reach their goal, they prove thereby that they were never on the right path.'[37] Out of the failure of republican insurrection grew the image of what Pearse called the 'apostolic succession'.[38] The notion held that uprisings could act as nationalistic statements to keep the republican ideal alive so that it 'passes down from generation to generation from the nation's fathers'.[39] None of the rebellions mentioned were ever intended merely to be futile dramatic gestures. Their organisers hoped on each occasion that they could mount a serious challenge to British rule. However, as John Devoy commented after the debacle of the 1867 rising, little

37. J. O'Leary, *Recollections of Fenians and Fenianism*, Vol.II (Shannon, 1968), pp. 242-243.
38. Pearse, *Ghosts*, Parts I-III.
39. *Ibid.*.

purposeful rationale could be claimed for the lack of success other than to pass 'on the "burning brand" to the generations that followed.'[40] The concept of the apostolic succession still plays a central role in sustaining the idea of a direct linear connection between the republicans of the present and the history of Irish resistance extending back, not just to Tone and the United Irishmen, but beyond to all the other rebellions ever since the Norman invasions of Ireland in the twelfth century.[41] The continuity of revolt is important in republican heritage as a source of inspiration. For many, the significant fact has not been that the rebellions did not succeed, but, in the words of Pearse, that the 'chain of the separatist tradition has never once snapped during the centuries.'[42]

Alongside the idea of the resuscitation of republicanism through exemplary military action exists a potent self-sacrificial motif. Those who are seen to have given their lives for Irish freedom are held up in the present, not just for admiration as past heroes, but to inspire emulation. Shortly after the rebel forces in Ireland had been defeated in 1798, Wolfe Tone proclaimed: 'From the blood of everyone of the martyrs of the liberty of Ireland will spring, I hope, thousands to revenge their fall'.[43] The essence of this entreaty for Tone's future disciples has been to harness the emotional power of martyrdom in order to draw people into the republican fold and create a forceful rejuvenating dynamic which can carry the movement forward to its objectives. For example, speaking of the influence of the executions of three Fenians in 1867 for their part in the rescue of two IRB men in Manchester in which a policeman was killed, the republican socialist, James Connolly, declared, 'the echo of those blows has for a generation been

40. J. Devoy, *Recollections of an Irish Rebel* (Shannon, 1969), p. 186.
41. See R. O'Bradaigh, 'What is Irish Republicanism?', in *Irish Independent*, 9 Dec. 1970.
42. P. Pearse, *Ghosts*, Parts IV-V, reprinted in *AP*, 24 Sept. 1926.
43. Quoted in T. Dunne, *Wolfe Tone: An Analysis of his Political Philosophy* (Cork, 1982), p. 60.

as a baptismal dedication to the soul and life of thousands of Irish men and women, consecrating them to the services of Irish freedom.'[44] Connolly's words illustrate the strong transcendental element contained in the appeal to martyrdom. Pearse invoked the memory of Emmet who was hanged after the 1803 rising, describing his death as a 'sacrifice Christ-like in its perfection' and affirmed: 'Be assured that such a death always means redemption... His attempt was not a failure, but a triumph for that deathless thing called Irish Nationality.'[45] The call is for individuals to submit themselves to a higher purpose. Sacrifice perpetuates the spirit of rebellion and achieves a form of national catharsis. Death is not considered to be an end but a continuation by laying the foundations for others to follow. The belief in redemption through violence and sacrifice reached its height in the few years preceding the 1916 uprising. Patrick Pearse and his co-conspiritors feared the slow extinction of Irish national identity if nothing was done to challenge British domination. Uninhibited by the experience of past rebellions, they wanted to launch a strike for Ireland, regardless of the immediate military outcome, in order to liberate a new generation to fight for Ireland's independence. As Thomas Clarke, a veteran IRB man and oldest of the 1916 rebels explained: 'We want a kind of spiritual dynamite to blow sky-high the chains of England on our minds and hearts.'[46]

The self-sacrificial image is a compelling symbol of republican ideology and something from which the movement continues to draw much of its inner strength. The ardent commitment to the republican ideal expressed through the actions of a nationalist vanguard is perhaps the main reason for the movement's longevity. It also goes a long way to explain the movement's tenacity even when confronted by vastly superior forces and, as often

44. Quoted in J. Connolly Heron (ed.), *The Words of James Connolly* (Cork, 1986), p. 79.
45. Quoted in Elliott, *Partners in Revolution*, p. 371.
46. Quoted in M. O'Dubhghaill, *Insurrection Fires at Eastertide* (Cork, 1966), p. 133.

as not, public hostility or incomprehension. These emotional undercurrents remain pertinent to the contemporary era in reinforcing the movement's own sense of legitimacy, as one grassroots PSF publication reiterated: 'It must be made clear to all that it is the Republican movement which has done the struggling, which has suffered the pain, which has kept the hope and the vision, which has kept faith with the past and the future.'[47]

Dogged determination is a vital ingredient for success in any strategy and in the capacity for sheer endurance the republican movement possesses a highly valuable resource. One danger of this emphasis on commitment and will power engendered by the sacrificial tradition is that it can encourage rather aberrant forms of elitist violence which are not apparently related to the achievement of political objectives. At worst, the rationale for bloodshed can slip into existentialist justifications where the cathartic element of martyrdom becomes the end in itself and the continuation of violence seen as virtuous for its own sake. On certain occasions such emotional impulses are detectable in republican literature. For instance, one newsletter from the mid 1970s, harking back to an earlier epoch recalled: 'Pearse wrote... "To fight is to win, not to fight is to lose." Sixty years later, his words are just as relevant now as they were then. No matter how long it takes, as long as we are fighting we are winning'.[48]

For the most part, though, the republican movement has stressed that the mystical appeal of self-sacrifice is a means to an end. Sacrifices in the present may not immediately achieve the republican dream but they are aimed at building momentum and gaining support so that one day the movement will be sufficiently strong to realise its ends, as the following passage reveals:

> The road before us lies clear and unmistakable... The Irish Republic for which all the generations have died... lies at the end of that road. It

47. *Eire Og* (PSF newsheet, West Belfast), Vol. 2., No. 4, n.d. (c. 1975).
48. *The Volunteer* (PSF, Lurgan), 9 April 1977.

> is a hard road to travel, because for many it may yet mean persecution, sacrifice, death, but it is the only road to freedom. Let us achieve unity of purpose to travel that road together in company with our comrades of a new generation who will complete the task of liberating this country from her dark night of bondage.[49]

It is not the intention of this study to dwell on the metaphysical aspects of republican thinking. The theme of self-sacrifice can be noted here as an important factor which sustains the movement's purpose and cohesion. The significant feature from a strategic point of view is that the concepts of the nationalist vanguard and the apostolic, or generational, succession can condition the use of violence independently of any large-scale popular backing. But, as Richard Kearney argues, in the Irish context this does serve a wider functional role for the republican movement. It is at times when republicans can portray themselves as sacrificial victims in the face of overwhelming odds that military failure can assume a certain mystique, thereby awakening the latent sympathies of the Irish people and from which the movement can hope to mobilise support and so increase its power.[50]

The Primary Means of Violence

Republican literature on the subject of physical force often exhibits a highly power orientated view of a world of competing political interests which rarely give way to each other except under the threat, or as a result of, military coercion. Conversely, scepticism towards more peaceful methods of persuasion is also clearly visible. Writing in the mid-nineteenth century Father John Kenyon, a supporter of the Young Ireland movement, asked: 'What is there in political rights more than any other rights that they should all be attainable by moral force alone?' He concluded: 'Moral force may obtain some rights... because some men are honest and intelligent,

49. S. O'Kelly, 'The United Irishmen were Republicans', *UI*, July/Aug. 1948.
50. See R. Kearney, 'The IRA's Strategy of Failure', in M. Hederman and R. Kearney (eds.), *The Crane Bag* (Dublin, 1982), pp. 700-702.

but it cannot obtain all rights, personal or political, because it is the fatal destiny of the earth, that many men will always be ignorant and vicious.'[51] No doubt, most strategists would identify in this type of remark a strong 'realist' position. Indeed, the acceptance of the inevitability of violent clashes of interest to resolve political struggles has been a consistent feature of republican belief, being reflected in declarations such as that made at the 1863 Fenian National Convention in Chicago, which stated that, 'no enslaved people [had] ever regained independence' except by methods deemed 'in the enslaver's sense rebellious and illegal.'[52]

Given this background, it is not surprising that, in the words of one republican analysis, the 'use of physical force' is regarded as 'the only instrument which would (or ever will) get rid of all these Anglicised forces in Ireland'.[53] The staunch belief in the utility of the military instrument has helped elevate the concept of physical force to the high ground of republicanism. 'Arms are the badges of freedom'[54] as Thomas Davis put it. This firm adherence to the principle of force, has bestowed republican doctrine with an almost permanent pre-disposition to engage in armed conspiracy, an imperative encapsulated by John Mitchel who continually exhorted his colleagues in the Young Ireland movement to make military preparations: 'Instead of "Agitate, agitate" I would say to the people "Arm!, Arm!"'[55] Contained in this imperative lies the crux of the movement's dedication to the use of force as the primary means to dislodge entrenched British colonial interests. It is not simply that republicans believe that the British remain unimpressed by peaceful political gestures but that the entire

51. 'Father John Kenyon: His views on Physical versus Moral Force', *UI*, Sept. 1948.
52. Quoted in E. Hull, *A History of Ireland and Her People*, Vol. II (London, n.d.), p. 338.
53. M. de Buitleir, 'The Tradition of Physical Force', (Part 2), *AP*, 21 April 1934.
54. Quoted in Norman, p. 124.
55. Quoted in O'Hegarty, *A History of Ireland Under the Union, 1801-1922*, p. 346.

constitutional arena is a deliberate British creation to frustrate and restrict Irish nationalist aspirations:

> Over the centuries [Britain] has persuaded many brave and trusting Irishmen to use peaceful political methods to attain their ends, or in other words, to play the game by her rules. What chance do you have playing against an opponent who dictates the rules? How can you beat a stacked deck? None of them ever did.[56]

In effect, those who pursue the peaceful road in good faith are seen as misguided whose efforts are wasted in a fruitless search to overcome the inspired obduracy of the British political system. However, republican antipathy towards the political process is fortified by another common suspicion that constitutional participation really conceals a lack of commitment to the goal of independence. According to Terence MacSwiney, a Lord Mayor of Cork who died on hunger strike in 1920: 'Moral force has been used persistently to cover up the weakness of every politician who was afraid or unwilling to fight for the whole rights of his country, and confusion has been the consequence.'[57]

Therefore, republicans feel that only by acting outside the realms of established peaceful political conduct can British rule be seriously challenged. This conclusion is based not merely on a series of intellectual postulations about the nature of British colonialism but on what republicans perceive as hard practical experience. They look back to the failure of Daniel O'Connell's efforts in the years between 1823 and 1843 to repeal the 1801 Act of Union, and later, to the blighted hopes and eventual demise of the Home Rule movement in the early twentieth century, as manifestations of the futility of the constitutional path. On the other hand, violence, even on a small scale, has been seen to yield results and act as an engine for political change. For example, in the wake of the IRB's bid to rescue its members at Manchester in October 1867, followed a few weeks later by the

56. 'Dustin', 'The Neology of a Military Campaign', *RN*, 10 April 1976.
57. T. MacSwiney, *Principles of Freedom* (Chapter 3), reprinted in *UI*, Feb. 1962.

killing of a dozen civilians in a bomb explosion in Clerkenwell, England was gripped by a wave of public anxiety over Fenian activities.[58] The political reverberations enabled William Gladstone, when he became Prime Minister in 1868, to turn his mind to Irish issues. 'These phenomena', Gladstone said referring to the incidents at Manchester and Clerkenwell, 'brought home to the popular mind... the vast import of the Irish controversy.'[59] The next few years saw the disestablishment of the Protestant Church of Ireland and the beginnings of the Home Rule movement. Britain had been seen to concede to, or at least have policy partially dictated by, the threat of violence. The point was not lost on the Fenians, causing John Devoy to observe that Gladstone's remarks had 'proved a stronger argument in favour of physical force - and even of terrorism - than any Irishman ever made.'[60]

Republicans can point to the agrarian violence of the Land War in the early 1880s, which produced a commitment from the government to introduce fundamental land reform in Ireland, and later to the IRA's campaign in the Anglo-Irish War, which secured the independence of the Irish Free State, as further proof to sustain the principle that: 'Spokesmen and negotiators are only effective when they can say: "We have guns to back our words."'[61] Today, the adage that 'armed force is the only language which Britain will listen to'[62] is uttered almost as a republican mantra. The strategic reality behind such apparent cliches, as one republican editorial of recent times grimly admitted, is that 'in the absence of any credible alternative to the armed struggle, we accept that bloodletting, however regrettable, will continue.'[63]

When republicans in this day and age pronounce upon the efficacy of

58. See L. O'Broin, *Fenian Fever* (London, 1971), pp. 210-217.
59. Quoted in Carty, p. 27.
60. Devoy, p. 250.
61. M. de Buitleir, 'The Tradition of Physical Force', (Part 1), *AP*, 7 April 1934.
62. *AP/RN*, 15 April 1982.
63. *AP/RN*, 28 Aug. 1986.

violence, few if any of them, have sufficient faith in the movement's military abilities that they believe Britain can be physically ejected from Ireland. 'I cannot imagine the IRA driving the British Army into the sea, or anything like that' acknowledged the one time president of PSF, Ruairi O'Bradaigh, in 1971.[64] Recognition of the disparity in power has necessarily entailed modifications in the nature of both operational conduct and the military objective sought in war. This has not always been the case. The rebellions of 1798, 1848 and 1867, for example, all hoped to gather sufficient men and material from within Ireland, or in the case of 1798 by seeking direct outside assistance, to defeat the British through force of arms and literally push them out of Ireland. Despite the record of failure, the mainstream of the republican movement remained devoted to old style insurrection throughout the nineteenth century. But by the mid-nineteenth century there were those ready to accept the implausibility of all out military confrontation. Lalor was edging his way to what would be a more realistic military posture for those wishing to challenge superior British force, when he wrote:

> To be successful, your fight must be a *defensive* one. The force of England is *entrenched* and *fortified*. You must draw it out of position; break up its mass; break its trained line of march and manoeuvre - its equal step and serried array... You must... nullify its tactique and strategy, as well as its discipline, decompose the science and systems of war, and resolve them into their first elements. You must make the hostile army a mob, as your own will be; force it to act on the *offensive* and oblige it to undertake operations for which it was never constructed.[65]

Lalor's statement contains the main structural pre-requisites of a guerrilla war theory, and at least indicates the transitional nature of republican strategic thinking in the era. For though the movement's strategic doctrine was to remain largely underdeveloped until the Anglo-

64. *Belfast Telegraph*, interview with R. O'Bradaigh, reprinted in *AP*, Sept. 1971.
65. Quoted in C. Townshend, *Political Violence in Ireland* (Oxford, 1983), p. 32.

Irish war, by the late nineteenth century a distinctive *modus operandi* was beginning to take shape. We have mentioned already in this regard that from the 1880s political assassination and bombing campaigns were to become an established feature of republican activity. In tandem with these developments the outline of a low intensity warfare doctrine also started to emerge. This was noticeable during the planning of the dynamiting campaigns by the Clan-na-Gael. One of the leading advocates of attacks against Britain, Patrick Ford, argued that: 'A few active, intrepid and intelligent men can do so much to annoy and hurt England. The Irish cause requires Skirmishers. It requires a little band of heroes who will initiate and keep up, without intermission, a guerrilla warfare'.[66] Originally, a Skirmishing campaign was envisaged only as a series of diversionary attacks as a prelude to a general insurrection in Ireland, though this never materialised. The significant point is that some Fenians were prepared to entertain the thought of military action within an extended time frame, rather than concentrating all efforts solely upon building up resources for a single, violent outburst of rebellion.

The gradual movement towards the acceptance of a more protracted war scenario would, in time, supplant the means of revolt as the primary military objective. As preparations for the dynamiting campaign progressed this shift became more discernable. James McDermott, one of the protagonists of the Skirmishing faction under O'Donovan Rossa, sketched out the purpose of the campaign: 'We don't mean to meet England on the open battlefield - that would be folly; but we do intend to carry on a warfare on the principle of nihilism... What we want to do is to free Ireland from the cruel yoke of British oppression.'[67] Perhaps the misleading use of the term 'nihilism'

66. Quoted in C. Townshend, *Political Violence in Ireland* (Oxford, 1983), p. 32
67. Source: *Weekly Union*, 10 July 1880, cited in M. Davitt, *The Fall of Feudalism in Ireland* (London, 1904), p. 433.

illustrated that the process of change was essentially one of groping erratically towards new concepts of military thinking. Nonetheless, McDermott caught the spirit of the changes taking place, and though the dynamiting campaigns were largely ineffective in terms of producing any tangible political results, they did mark out the future course of republican strategy. Henceforward, there was a greater willingness to consider military acts on the basis of their political impact. No longer would warfare be conceived entirely in its conventional sense where there could be little doubt that the stronger side, the British, would always win.

Modern republican strategic thought focuses on the proposition that small-scale destructive acts can be used, not to reach any conclusive decision through force of arms, but to extend the duration of the conflict in order to wear down the morale of the opponent. Exponents of this military philosophy, like Robert Taber, are regularly cited to support IRA actions. According to one republican periodical the 'revolutionary principle' revolves around Taber's thesis that '"the object of the guerrilla is not to win battles, but to avoid defeat, not to end the war but to prolong it, until political victory, more important than any battlefield victory, has been won."'[68] It is within this sort of strategic format that the combination of the republican movement's trenchant belief in the utility of violence and the total dedication to the purity of the national object, can form a potentially valuable weapon. It is the fusion of these two elements which gives the movement the ability to maintain a continuous level of operational activity over a considerable length of time, thereby denying the British the complete victory it is believed they seek. Through these means, the republican movement can aim to confront the British with the prospect of an interminable conflict involving a costly and open ended commitment. In so doing, the movement can hope to outlast Britain's will to hold on.

68. Quoted in *The Volunteer* (PSF, Derry), Aug. 1974.

A writer in the republican press in the early 1970s probably best described the basic premise of the movement's attitude towards the use of force by claiming that 'almost all civilisations on Earth owe their continued existence during conflicts, to the success of violence. I don't think the fact that the use of volence can bring success is at issue.'[69] It is this kind of prominence accorded to the subject of violence in politics which brings with it a series of potential hazards for republican strategy. The adoption of a rather unquestioning approach towards the functionality of violence risks concentrating all attention on violent means to the exclusion of other methods which might also enhance the movement's effectiveness. This exclusivism was encapsulated by Lalor's appeal to Irishmen to defend their rights: 'Let men differ as they may about other principles, there is one principle that admits no dispute... the first priniciple of BLOW FOR BLOW; blow for blow in self-defence - no matter for who or wherefore, no matter for risk or result.'[70]

An even more serious potential problem, and an accusation which the movement has had to periodically fend off, is that when unstinting faith in the value of violence blends with the more mystical elements of republican ideology, violence can cease to be regarded as an instrument of policy, and instead, be treated as an object of reverence in its own right. Predictably perhaps, it has been Patrick Pearse who is often viewed as the main proponent of a cult of violence.[71] In one of Pearse's most notable statements he argued:

> We must accustom ourselves to the thought of arms, to the sight of arms, to the use of arms. We may make mistakes in the beginning and shoot the wrong people: but bloodshed is a cleansing thing, and the nation

69. Beechmount Correspondent, 'The Question of Physical Force', *AP*, 19 Jan. 1973.
70. J. Fintan Lalor, *Irish Felon*, No. 4, reprinted in L. Fogarty (ed.), *James Fintan Lalor* (Dublin, 1918), p. 107.
71. For a critical view of Pearse in this regard see X. Carty, *In Bloody Protest* (Dublin, 1978).

> which regards it as the final horror has lost its manhood. There are many things more horrible than bloodshed and slavery is one of them.[72]

Easy as it is to imagine Pearse as a lurid militarist, it should be said that trust in the spiritually enobling virtues of violence was a pervasive theme in the Edwardian era prior to World War One.[73] Pearse should be seen in this context. Furthermore, the republican movement has shown itself to be aware of this danger and prepared to deny any emotional attachment to violence. For instance, Terence McSwiney stressed that in the cause of freedom *'war must be faced and blood must be shed, not gleefully, but as a terrible necessity'* and that 'the mind must guide and govern our passion.'[74] Sensitivity to this issue is also reflected in the recent age of republican violence. All the same, as the following passage indicates, within republican rhetoric there is still a hint of what one may call a 'Pearseite' sub-text which sees fighting as more laudable than mere passivity:

> The IRA know that physical force is not the sole means of revolutionary social change. Guns do not have political principles. The Republican movement is agonisingly aware that armed struggle without a just goal, and based on a reasonable chance of achieving either defence of a beleagured community or the liberation of our country, is monstrously without merit. Possession of arms is no certain test of patriotism, but... the IRA believe that the risks of a carefully planned and principled armed struggle are nothing to the shame of slavery.[75]

The basic difficulty from a strategic theorist's standpoint, however, concerns the inherent limitations of armed force when viewed within a complete conflict scenario. If one recognises the unique coercive qualities of violence in its proper strategic sense as a rational policy instrument, then presumably one's adversary is also likely to see the functional benefits of violence. This poses a problem if the adversary happens to be more powerful than oneself. The danger exists of a discrepancy appearing between the

72. Quoted in R. Dudley Edwards, *Patrick Pearse* (London, 1977), p. 179.
73. See B. Bond, *War and Society in Europe, 1870-1970* (London, 1984), pp. 72-99.
74. McSwiney, *Principles of Freedom*.
75. Le Traolach, 'Connolly's Charter Championed by IRA', *AP*, Sept. 1972.

scale of political demands and the capability to achieve them through the coercion of the enemy. It is axiomatic that the attainment of one's political goals through war will be secured via the defeat of the enemy. The most assured way to obtain victory will be through the destruction of the enemy's forces. To ensure success in war pre-supposes that one possesses the necessary strength to defeat the enemy.[76] Rarely are wars so clear cut. That is why many, if not most, wars are uncertain undertakings. But for a demonstrably weaker side the issue is even more problematic, for no matter how skilful its military blows may be, they will be no guarantee of political victory. Here lies one of the key questions so far as the progression of this study is concerned. How has the republican movement sought to manipulate the military instrument to compensate for its limited capacity for physical denial *vis-a-vis* British power? Resolving this question is one of the major arts in creating a coherent low intensity war strategy as it requires a subtle understanding of the delicacies involved in applying military means to challenge the superior power of an opponent.

Absolutism and Abstentionism

One effect of the intensity of the republican movement's commitment to its vision of an Ireland free from British rule has been the desire to see this goal transformed into reality in its complete form. Pearse argued: 'that no "half-way house" is possible as a permanent solution of the issue between Ireland and England. There were and are only two alternatives: an enslaved Ireland and a free Ireland.'[77] The stark choice available suggested by Pearse, rejected any thought of compromise between the two positions. It was all or nothing. It is an attitude which has become a prevalent feature of the republican tradition. The movement does not see itself in business

76. See Clausewitz, pp. 596-597 and p. 601.
77. P. Pearse, *Political Writings and Speeches* (Dublin, 1952), p. 268.

to gain improvements which merely rehabilitate the *status quo*. This bearing has been stated clearly by Sean MacStiofain, the first Chief of Staff of the Provisional IRA, who said that 'the sacrifices and sufferings of revolutionary war can never be justified by mere reform.'[78] The implication that concessions cannot compensate for past sacrifices makes the concept of absolute obedience to republican objectives a highly symbolic principle. Any relaxation in the demand for independence is seen as a betrayal of the republican ideal. In Pearse's words:

> The man who, in the name of Ireland, accepts as a "final settlement" anything less by one fraction of an iota than separation from England... is guilty of so immense an infidelity, so immense a crime against the Irish nation, that one can only say of him that it were better for that man (as it were certainly better for his country) that he had not been born.[79]

The concept of absolutism compounds republican suspicions about the constitutional process, which, as noted earlier, is also partly a function of the movement's adherence to the use of violence. Not only has political participation been regarded as ineffective but also as ideologically corrupting. This has led to the movement's abstinence from direct involvement in the political institutions of Ireland. The reasons for political abstention were spelled out succinctly in 1976:

> At no time will they [republicans] give substance to the shadow of democracy by participation in partitionist politics. To do so would be to acknowledge not only the existence of two states in Ireland but also by contesting elections and taking their seats they would be acknowledging the rights of those two states to legislate for and on behalf of their respective areas and would spell the end of republicanism as we know it today.[80]

The sense of threat felt by the movement of being seen to confer any degree of legitimacy on British rule in Ireland has been a major republican concern through many generations. Lalor disapproved of any participation within a constitutional arrangement which he believed had its boundaries of

78. S. MacStiofain, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary* (Edinburgh, 1975), p. 258.
79. Pearse, *Ghosts*, parts I-III.
80. L. MacLiam, 'Republicans Will Continue Struggle for National Liberation', *RN*, 20 March 1976.

action artificially restricted by the British.[81] Neither were the Fenians especially interested in politics. Indeed, the Fenians in some respects were born out of disillusionment with parliamentary politics after the failure in the 1850s of the Tenants Rights League to make any headway on the land reform issue. One leading Fenian, Charles Kickham, argued that the experience of the period had demonstrated that parliamentary action was 'a demoralising sham'.[82] Later in the century, the IRB gave limited backing to the Home Rule party which was co-operating with the Land League to secure land reforms. Despite its initial sympathy, the IRB withdrew its support in August 1876 on the grounds that land rights were really a distraction from the principal goal of seeking independence.[83]

Fundamentally, republican misgivings over political activity have for a long time been rooted in the perception that the political process is the domain of the unprincipled where the purity of the ideology could be entrapped and undermined in the murky world of compromise, careerism and expediency. It is this sort of feeling which has often offended the ascetism of republican certainties; the belief that it is simply dishonest for the movement to enter into a political system which it has been pledged to destroy for so many years: As one republican writer remarked:

> *To put it bluntly: We cannot live the lie of false oaths and declarations; we cannot swallow the lie of participating in - and thereby perpetuating - parliamentary assemblies which have their being in Britain's alleged right to decide what kind of administration Ireland is to have and how far she will be permitted to conduct her own affairs. We cannot break our covenant of truth with either the living or the dead.*[84]

The uncompromising stance of the republican movement has a distinctive influence on the process of strategic formulation. It provides the movement with a clear sense of direction in life, ensuring that it will not be shaken from the primary function of confronting British rule in Ireland.

81. McCaffrey, *The Irish Question, 1800-1922*, pp. 68-69.
82. Quoted in R. Comerford, *Charles J. Kickham* (Dublin, 1979), p. 47.
83. See *ibid.*, pp. 131-132.
84. D. Breatnach, 'The Republican Ethic', *AP*, July 1970.

For example, Pearse asserted that no national leader should involve himself in any issue other than the struggle for independence 'except with the object of strengthening his forces for the main fight - the fight for nationhood'.[85] The stubborn refusal to be deflected from the central task has done much to consolidate the republican tradition, which has made the movement resistant to short term set backs and enabled it to withstand a long term challenge to British power.

For the most part, however, republican absolutism brings with it prospective adverse effects, largely because it robs the movement of political flexibility. Speaking in the early years of the conflict in Northern Ireland Daithi O'Conaill declared:

> Today the central issue in the war is one of conflict between Ireland's right to freedom and England's determination to keep us in subjection. All other issues are subordinate to this basic point. There can be no compromise on the fundamental issue as to who should rule Ireland - the parliament or the Irish people.[86]

O'Conaill's opinions heavily paralleled those of Pearse and the rest, but they were also a strong indication that the republican movement had little or no conception that ends in war could be modified to take into account the varying abilities of political actors to coerce each other. Such a view tends to refute the idea that in low intensity warfare the weaker side should wield the military instrument in order to maximise its power and then endeavour to reach a political settlement which reflects this optimal position. In other words, republicans view war as a straight attempt to win all of the objectives being pursued, regardless of the actual capacity to achieve them through violent means. This places the republican movement in something of a rhetorical bind as its deficiency in coercive power relative to that of Britain occasionally leads it to employ tendentious arguments to sustain the advocacy of physical force. Republican proponents claim that: 'Only

85. Pearse, *Political Writings and Speeches*, p. 105.
86. Quoted in *The Irish Times*, 23 April 1973.

physical force has succeeded in winning any reforms or concessions'. But they are quick to add that 'concessions can never be accepted at the price of perpetuating greater injustices than those they alleviate.'[87] This is really a *non-sequitur*. As those like Pearse and MacStiofain have argued, there can be no half-way house on the demand for independence. Reforms are unacceptable to republicans precisely because they promote half-way house solutions which perpetuate injustices by maintaining the *status quo*. Republicans cannot, therefore, plausibly contend that reforms and concessions validate the use of violence if reforms and concessions are actually considered to be good for nothing because they merely entrench the existing political order without bringing the movement any nearer to its objectives. The element of sophistry evident in some republican rhetoric appears as an implicit admission that the movement has been strained to construct a viable strategy which centres around the employment of armed force. This is an important point, as it suggests that the movement has great difficulty in countenancing the use of force to move towards its goals through intermediate stages. The movement might, therefore, feel inhibited from taking advantage of any political opportunities created by a military campaign out of fear that interim positions will become permanent.

One reason for republican inflexibility stems from the concept of the nationalist vanguard which excludes any requirement for prior popular support as an aid to revolt. Historically, the absence of the desire to cultivate a political constituency has meant that the movement has seen little need to produce social, political and economic policies which would encourage a wide following. For most of the twentieth century, though, republicans have felt it necessary to enunciate vague socialistic ideals, but they have also been careful to stress where the priorities of the struggle lay, as Jack Bennett made clear:

87. S. O'Riain, *Provos: Patriots or Terrorists?* (Dublin, 1974), p. 35.

> ...it may be considered valid in today's conditions to set some form of socialism as an ultimate objective - so long as 'socialism' is not made a pre-condition for achieving national freedom, and so long as the attainment first of the necessary democratic, national framework is kept to the forefront as the central and most important objective.[88]

Without the articulation of a clear vision of a post-independence society the movement frequently has to base its appeal on the hazy image of an indivisible nation which provides powerful inspiration for the committed few but often lacks broader appeal. This can prove detrimental for any national liberation group as it by-passes sources of latent power which might be tapped by a more politically and socially conscious movement. Some theorists like Lalor and Connolly recognised the potential in trying to couple political issues to the republican cause. In Connolly's words, 'the linking together of our national aspirations with the hopes of the men and women who have raised the standard of revolt against that system of capitalism and landlordism... would serve to place us in touch with fresh reservoirs of moral and physical strength'.[89] However, the dismay at the Irish workers' enthusiasm for the British cause in World War One which finally drove Connolly into the 1916 uprising[90] ensured that his legacy became firmly rooted in the vanguard tradition. According to one republican tract of the early 1970s: 'Apathy forced him to countenance the one shock method that could not be ignored - armed resistance to alien rule.'[91]

The intermix of ideological absolutism with military vanguardism can leave organisations like the republican movement politically unsensitised with the result that they find it difficult to alternate between political

88. J. Bennett in Cronin and Roche, p. 65.
89. J. Connolly, 'Socialism and Nationalism', *Shan van Vocht*, Jan. 1897 reprinted in P. Beresford Ellis (ed.), *James Connolly: Selected Writings* (London, 1988) p. 122.
90. See J. Boyle, 'Connolly, the Citizen Army and the Rising', in Nowlan, *The Making of 1916*, pp. 66-67. See also J. Connolly, 'Ireland - Disaffected or Revolutionary?', *Workers Republic*, 13 Nov. 1915, reprinted in P. McAonghusa and L. O'Reagain (eds.), *The Best of Connolly* (Cork, 1967), pp. 176-179.
91. Le Traolach, 'Connolly's Charter Championed by IRA'.

and military tactics. Peace can literally become a pause in between a period of fighting as all energies will be directed towards preparing for the next military exploit. This problem has undoubtedly been reflected in the Irish republican experience. The question of the relationship between force and politics in republican strategy was to prove a recurring source of dispute for much of the twentieth century. Before his conversion to the precepts of insurrection, James Connolly castigated those republicans who exalted in physical force. He believed that for many, physical force was the only principle upon which they could agree. This precluded discussion of all other topics relating to the nature of the ends to be attained. 'Nationalists of our day', Connolly exclaimed, 'are utterly regardless of principle and only attach importance to methods - an instance of putting the cart before the horse, absolutely unique in its imbecility and unparalled in the history of the world.'[92] Within a militarily top heavy political organisation to which Connolly alluded, it is going to be difficult to identify any source of authority beyond the military realm capable of influencing the organisation's conduct. In this respect, the paucity of political thought can negate the idea that policy should be able to shape the military instrument for the purpose of achieving specific goals. Yet if one is not precise about the extent of the political aims to be sought, then how can one gauge with any accuracy the military objectives necessary to realise one's political demands? The risk of employing armed force without having clearly defined policy objectives is that groups, such as the republican movement, will end up as a permanent military conspiracy where the use of violence becomes internally legitimised as an end in itself rather than as a means to achieve anything politically tangible.

92. J. Connolly, 'Physical Force in Irish Politics', *Workers Republic*, 22 July 1899, reprinted in Beresford Ellis, p. 208.

Rhetorical Secularism versus Crypto-Sectarianism

The republican movement maintains an explicit commitment to the establishment of a secular society in Ireland. The aim is 'to limit the control of the Churches to things spiritual and to treat everyone equal before God.'[93] Along with this undertaking the movement promotes the idea of a common national identity to which all groups in Ireland can subscribe. The rejection of sectarianism was made plain by Wolfe Tone who stated that his means of undermining the connection with England were to 'unite the whole people of Ireland, to abolish the memory of all past dissensions and to substitute the common name of Irishman in place of the denominations of Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter.'[94] Tone believed that both Catholics and Dissenters (Presbyterians) were excluded from power by the perpetuation of the ruling aristocratic Anglo-Irish ascendancy. He concluded that it was in Protestant interests to combine forces with Catholics against the common enemy. 'Thus', as one republican reflected, 'were two groups drawn together by injustices perpetrated on both of them and this mutual bond was soon to be reinforced by the most dynamic political ideology in the history of this island - that of Republicanism.'[95] So it was that many of the leading figures in the United Irishmen and Young Irelanders were Protestants, including Tone himself, as well as Davis and Mitchel. Protestants were also prominent in the sphere of constitutional nationalism with people like Isaac Butt, the founder of the Home Rule party and the outstanding parliamentary leader, Charles Stewart Parnell. Invariably republicans invoke the tradition of Protestant involvement with the nationalist cause to appeal to Protestants, in Daithi O'Conaill's terms, to 'work with us for the creation of a new Ireland worthy of the memory of Wolfe Tone.'[96] While republican

93. P. Flynn, 'What is Irish Republicanism?', *AP/RN*, 11 Oct. 1980.
94. Quoted in McAonghusa and O'Reagain, *The Best of Wolfe Tone*, p. 46.
95. O'Riain, p. 7.
96. D. O'Conaill, Bodenstown Speech, *AP*, July 1970.

ideology sees the Protestant community as integral to the Irish nation, this conception sets clear boundaries to the Protestants' room for political manoeuvre. These limits were signalled by Pearse who insisted 'that the nation is more important than any part of the nation'.[97] Accordingly, as Protestants are deemed to be a national minority they can have no independent existence outside the nation as a collective whole. It is this attitude, combined with the analysis of Ireland as a problem of colonialism, which has governed the way republicans have interpreted developments in Irish political history since the 1790s. As they see it, after the United Irish rebellion there emerged not two nations but two traditions. Sean O'Riain has described one tradition as that which has transcended religious differences and dedicated itself to the cause of independence. The other, he has alleged, 'was prepared to subjugate nationality to economic, sectarian and social expediency.'[98] The main republican contention here, is that after the British relinquished formal control over the twenty six counties of the Irish Free State in 1922, they continued to exert a form of colonial control over Ireland by carefully nurturing these anti-nationalist elements. Eamon de Valera expressed republican concerns thus: 'England cannot continue ruling us, and cheating us alike equally North and South, unless she can find here a section of our own people prepared to play her game for her.'[99]

Republicans disclaim the view that the collaborationist tendency in Irish politics has any intrinsic foundation in the Protestant religion,[100] but they do recognise that the 'political alignment of the people in the six counties approximates to the differences in their religious beliefs.'[101]

> This factor has been of inestimable value to England in pursuing her policy of "divide and conquer," because of it she has been enabled to give the struggle for Irish freedom, in so far as it pertains to Ulster, a

97. Pearse, *Political Writings and Speeches*, p. 104.
98. O'Riain, p. 8.
99. E. de Valera, 'Save Ulster for Ireland', *AP*, 4 Dec. 1925.
100. See Adams, *The Politics of Irish Freedom*, p. 116.
101. P. MacLogain 'Partition: Its Causes and Consequences', *UI*, May 1948.

> religious complexion. By playing on religious fears and beliefs of Protestants she has built up a garrison of natives prepared to serve her purpose and what she has taught them to believe are their own interests.'[102]

Normally republicans have been more hesitant than the passage above implies to specifically name the Protestant community as the sole agents of loyalism. Rather, they have preferred to see Protestants as part of a wider 'ruling class... determined to hold onto the privileges they enjoy under British rule; privileges that to some extent at least, would be denied to them in a "free" Ireland.'[103] As a result, republicans believe that along with the 'majority of the Protestant population', Britain's native allies since the late eighteenth century have included 'middle-class... Roman Catholic business people and the Catholic Church hierarchy.'[104]

Not surprisingly, the depiction of loyalists as mere ciphers in the British imperial system hardly endears the majority of Protestants to the republican cause. To many Protestants, Irish republicanism appears a sectarian doctrine geared towards the defence, and triumph of, Irish Catholic nationalism. Conversely, republican suspicion of loyalism can shade off into crypto-sectarianism, and on occasions, barely disguised anti-Protestant prejudice. Gerry Adams, for instance, asserts that 'loyalists have a desperate identity crisis... over whether they are Ulster-Scotch, Picts, English or British.' Rather than participate in a common Irish heritage, he argues, 'they waste their time trying to work out some kind of obscure notion of Ulster Protestant culture.'[105] Regardless of whether Protestants embrace Irish culture as a whole either inside or outside the framework of a unitary state, it is not unreasonable to expect that Northern Protestants, with their own distinctive traditions, should wish to cultivate a regional identity. The denigration of this aspiration by the republican movement's foremost

102.*Ibid.*.
103.*Ibid.*.
104.PSF, *Freedom Struggle in Ireland* (Dublin, n.d., *c.* mid-1970s), p. 3.
105.Adams, *The Politics of Irish Freedom*, pp. 124-125.

contemporary theoretician, and his implicit association of Protestants with what he calls loyalism's 'bigoted and irrational hatred of Catholics'[106] registers a sectarian dimension to republican thinking. The movement's sectarian affiliations have been most discernable in Northern Ireland where the IRA has traditionally been regarded as a Catholic defence force. In 1987 the prominent Catholic churchman, Father Denis Faul, affirmed that for many Catholics the Provisional IRA provides 'the last insurance card against the madmen of extreme Protestantism'.[107]

A glance beneath the secular rhetoric reveals republican attitudes towards the Protestant community to be just as confused as republicans believe the loyalists are over their own identity. In a recent pronouncement on the issue, Adams sought to emphasise 'that "Brits Out" is not a call as is often mischievously suggested, for the forced banishment of those in the north who presently consider themselves to be British subjects.'[108] Despite this apparent statement of good intent, it has been republicans as much as anyone else who have helped fuel speculation as to whether Northern Protestants would have much of a future in a republican Ireland. The analyst, Padraig O'Malley, has pointed out that in the republican mind Protestants exist in a kind of limbo where regard for the loyalist community can veer with rapidity from conciliation to animosity.[109] On occasions, republicans claim the loyalists to be an intrinsic element of the Irish nation or that the 'Protestant working class are our brothers and sisters.'[110] At other times, loyalists have been variously described as 'Williamite adventurers, planters and settlers... their outlook as hopelessly anti-Irish as their

106.*Ibid.*, p. 116
107.*The Belfast Telegraph*, 24 June 1987, cited in A. Guelke, *Northern Ireland: The International Perspective* (Dublin, 1988), p. 32.
108.Adams, *A Pathway to Peace*, p. 11.
109.See P. O'Malley, *The Uncivil Wars* (Belfast, 1983), pp. 287-299.
110.Adams, *A Pathway to Peace*, p. 11.

ancestors,"[111] or as 'neo-facists, anti-nationalist and anti-democratic."[112] As late as 1986 loyalists were being stigmatised as *'colonisers who will always wage terror against the colonised as a form of blackmail against the imperial power when it threatens to upset their hegemony.'* [113] It is the ambivalence in the republican position which can seem threatening to many Protestants. Moreover, the blurred republican distinction between Protestants and the colonial ideology of loyalism can make the sectarian threat appear all too real when IRA actions are directed against local security forces in Northern Ireland drawn largely from the Protestant population.

Perhaps the most curious aspect of the republican movement's position over the sectarian issue is its relationship to the philosophy of Wolfe Tone. During the PSF-SDLP talks in 1988, the SDLP team claimed that when Tone wrote of his intention to "substitute the name of Irishmen in place of the denominations of Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter" he was stating with great clarity that his means or method of breaking the link with England was to unite the people of Ireland first."[114] In other words, Tone was not advocating a simple 'Brits Out' policy but appealing for conciliation between the communities in Ireland before moves towards independence could be contemplated. The SDLP pressed PSF by asking whether the 'republican vision is being advanced and whether the Tone goal "to abolish past dissensions" is being furthered in any way by an IRA campaign which is directed largely against indigenous people seen by the Protestant people as the defenders and protectors of their heritage?"[115]

PSF did not respond to the SDLP line of questioning but, in fact, previous republican statements do supply an answer. In 1981, during the

111.De Buitleir, 'The Tradition of Physical Force', (part 2).
112.*AP/RN*, 5 Nov. 1981, cited in O'Malley, p. 288.
113.*AP/RN*, 28 Aug. 1986.
114.SDLP Document No. 1 (PSF-SDLP Talks, 1988), 17 March 1988, p. 4.
115.SDLP Document No. 4 (PSF-SDLP Talks, 1988), reprinted in *The Irish Times*, 19 Sept. 1988.

speech delivered at the annual Wolfe Tone commemoration ceremony at Bodenstown, Co. Kildare, Danny Morrison of PSF admitted that Tone's original aim had been to unify Catholics and Protestants against Britain. Morrison argued that British instigated sectarianism was stronger than Tone had realised. Consequently, the scale of rural Catholic discontent at the time of 1798 was such that it gave way 'to an almost Catholic peasant rebellion in parts of the South.' 'And how else could it have been', he continued, 'given the power of the British in Ireland and the sectarianism which they had deliberately sown and continued to sow to this day?' There was a clear lesson for the republican movement to draw:

> While the British remain in the North propping up partition, they feed sectarianism and overwhelmingly determine the behaviour pattern of the Protestant people. There can never be real unity between the people of the North while the British remain because they distort the picture. But with the British out and Ireland one national unit, all will savour equally the fruits of freedom, justice, prosperity and peace.'[116]

Morrison's analysis, partial though it was, did contain a degree of logic and was more than simple casuistry or self-justification. It was true that during the 1798 rebellion the uprising around Wexford drifted into sectarian conflict with atrocities being committed against local Protestants.'[117] Partly out of fear at the sectarian passions aroused in the rebellion, but also for a variety of mainly social and economic reasons, Protestants turned away from nationalism and embraced the union with Great Britain, leaving the mass of aggrieved Catholics standing for self-determination.'[118] The alternatives facing republicans in the wake of Protestant estrangement from the nationalist cause were limited. They were either to try to reach an accommodation between Catholic and Protestant interests which risked being both divisive and ineffectual, or to attempt to travel with the majority of disaffected Catholics. There was no real choice in the

116.D. Morrison, Bodenstown Speech, *AP/RN*, 27 June 1981.
117.See T. Ireland, *Ireland Past and Present* (New York, 1942), p. 222.
118.P. Johnson, *Ireland: Land of Troubles* (London, 1980), p. 76.

matter. By the mid-nineteenth century and the rise of the Fenians, the republican movement was representative of a constituency overwhelmingly Catholic in composition. The development of republicanism towards the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with its promotion of a distinctive Gaelic cultural vision, became a doctrine with which Protestants found it increasingly difficult to identify.[119] Although republicans may not have preferred it this way, the logic of their position was that the practical mechanics of republican nationalism, since the mid-nineteenth century, were never fully national.

The intention here is not to pass judgement on the moral integrity of the republican movement's stand over the sectarian question, but to point out that it does raise a number of issues within the strategic ambit. In the republican view, because the phenomenon of loyalism is a product of a British imperial power play, it does not have a great deal of innate power. According to one PSF discussion paper, 'loyalism derives an artificial strength from the British presence.'[120] Correspondingly, loyalism cannot be expected to have any independent life outside the configuration of a British presence in Ireland as it will collapse once British support is withdrawn. The assumption contained in this interpretation is that no power other than Britain can act to prevent Irish unification, thus eliminating loyalism from the republicans' strategic calculations. Therefore, from the republican perspective, as Jack Bennett has claimed, there is nothing to stop Britain from legislating the loyalists in Northern Ireland, against their will, 'into a new situation in which they could quickly adapt themselves to the idea of equal citizenship and claim for themselves an effective democratic voice in the running of their own country'.[121] The implication here is that because loyalists cannot influence British policy towards Northern Ireland one way

119.See M. Tierney, *Modern Ireland Since 1850* (Dublin, 1978), pp. 87-89.
120.PSF, *A Scenario for Peace* (Dublin), May 1987, p. 2.
121.J. Bennett in Cronin and Roche, pp. 20-21.

or the other, republicans can use the military instrument to disrupt the British connection without any regard for the political repercussions this may have inside the loyalist community.

Because republicans assume that loyalism has no status in the eyes of the British, they believe that with Britain removed from the picture, the loyalists can be enticed into seeing the virtue of obtaining a real degree of influence within an all Ireland context. Gerry Adams thinks that loyalists will continue to fight for their own sectarian interests so long as the British connection remains. Once Britain is out of the way, the loyalists would eventually work out where their real future lay. 'Loyalists', Adams declared, 'can have no significant say under British rule... but they can have and should have a very big say in the future shape of an independent Irish constitution and in the shape of an independent Irish society.'[122]

In so far as it is difficult to anticipate most future developments, the republican analysis exists in the realm of extreme prognostication. There can be no foolproof guide to future loyalist actions. For that reason what strategists might ponder is the nature of possible loyalist responses to changes in the political climate. Conceivably, it might be true, as Bennett has suggested, that there would be little the loyalists could do if the British government decided to legislate them out of the United Kingdom. But could they be legislated into a united Ireland? If Adams' proposition is right, that the loyalists would be able to have a 'big say' in the future shape of a new post-British Ireland, then what would happen if the loyalists used their 'big say' to reject the political union of Ireland? Could they then be coerced? This would raise the question about the extent to which a British withdrawal would actually change the existing power relationship in Ireland between the forces of unionism and the forces of nationalism? Should these types of questions be addressed, they may give republicans the

122.Adams, *The Politics of Irish Freedom*, p. 124.

opportunity of contemplating how much of a real barrier the lack of loyalist consent poses to the unification of Ireland, and whether the effects of republican military operations on Protestant opinion significantly detract from the movement's prospects of attaining its objectives?

Themes in Irish Republican Strategic Thinking

The purpose of this chapter has been to map out the parameters of republican strategic formulation. It has sought to do this by exploring the characteristics of, and lines of continuity within, republican thought. As has been indicated in the text, many of the characteristics alluded to are central to both republican ideology and identity. As a consequence, they are likely to affect the way the movement relates to the military instrument.

It should be said at this point, that the features which have been analysed in this chapter have not exerted a uniform influence on republican strategy. Certain themes have been more dominant at different times. For example, the extent to which the republican movement could adhere in practice to a non-sectarian stance became a crucial issue from the early to mid-1970s. The question as to how far the military instrument could be manipulated to achieve the movement's political goals was pertinent to the period between 1919 and 1923. The relationship between force and politics in republican strategy was to become an object of fundamental contention in the late 1960s and early 1980s. And so on. The intention in the forthcoming chapters is to use these themes to help explain how the movement has attempted to employ armed force in pursuit of its political objectives at key periods in its history.

The analysis contained in this chapter has also ventured to set down some of the potential drawbacks, as well as advantages, in the republican approach. As the introduction to this study made clear, no political actor

can be expected to be entirely rational or intellectually coherent. If this was the case, then political actors would always be able to exploit the military instrument with absolute efficiency and maximise their interests to the optimum. In the real world this never happens. Political actors have to endeavour to carve out a strategy through a mire of complexity, always with limited resources, deficient information and often with divergent requirements. In the process of trying to fashion a clear-sighted strategy the actor is likely to confront tensions within his own thinking. One of the most striking paradoxes in respect of republican thought is the apparent dichotomy between the movement's hard-headed belief in the instrumentality of force and the somewhat mystical devotion to the concept of the Irish nation. One view tends to support a highly power-political approach, while the other is symptomatic of an intense emotional commitment seemingly untrammelled by a world of tough realities. These two facets are bound to cause a measure of friction in strategic planning. Therefore, by mentioning some of the theoretical difficulties with the republican viewpoint is not to suggest that the movement will inevitably become tangled in a web of its own contradictions, but rather to describe the possible lines along which the application of force may develop in order to provide a guide to work through aspects of republican strategic thinking to their logical conclusions. Through these means, strategists can evaluate how republicans seek to construct their strategy, utilise the military instrument and reconcile doctrinal contradictions - in other words, all those elements which make the Irish republican movement a genuinely interesting case study in low intensity warfare.

CHAPTER 2

TRANSITIONS IN IRISH REPUBLICAN STRATEGY - THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MILITARY INSTRUMENT FROM THE EASTER RISING TO THE CIVIL WAR

Thus far, the discussion has been confined to the classification of the main elements that would have a bearing on the development of Irish republican strategic thought. Attention will now be focused more specifically on the republican experience in the twentieth century. This chapter first analyses how the repercussions of the 1916 rising helped shift the emphasis in republican thinking to enable the IRA to wage a prolonged guerrilla campaign against the British. The analysis assesses how the movement exploited its military potential to bring the British to agree to the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921. The chapter then investigates how the treaty settlement revealed the existence of two very different strategic perspectives within the movement between the pragmatists and the doctrinaires who refused to accept the limited sovereignty granted by the Treaty. Finally, the chapter looks at the deleterious impact doctrinaire thinking had on the anti-Treaty IRA's strategy in the Irish civil war.

For many republicans the apotheosis of the tradition of rebellion was reached in the Easter of 1916 when a small group of rebels seized the centre of Dublin and proclaimed the creation of an Irish republic. This event has mesmerised the movement ever since. The rising is celebrated annually and the memory of its leaders intoned regularly to validate republican actions in the present. In 1986 the movement's Easter declarations insisted that the modern day members of the IRA 'are the inheritors of 1916 because they have the same spirit of freedom which motivated the 1916 rebels'.[1] Ruairi O'Bradaigh has even identified the influence of the 1916 rising as the central feature of the modern republican persona: 'a republican today is one who rejects the partition statelets and gives his allegiance to and seeks to

1. 'The Inheritors of 1916', *AP/RN*, 3 April 1986.

restore the 32 county republic of Easter Week.'[2]

In the chronicles of Irish revolt, the rising of 1916 was a significant military encounter. The rebels held out for five days before surrendering. The end of the rising left 500 people dead, 2500 injured and a large area of the centre of Dublin devastated. Yet the rising, in itself, so far as it relates to the progression of this analysis, does not constitute an especially meaningful strategic episode. Indeed, a very narrow interpretation of strategic theory would hold the rising to be no more than another failed attempt at insurrection. The relevance of 1916 for our purposes lies not within the relative merits of the rising as a military operation, but in its impact on the republican movement in relation to the changing political climate in Ireland between 1916 and 1918 that would culminate in the outbreak of the Anglo-Irish war, 1919-1921, followed by the Irish civil war, 1922-1923.

The reason why the Easter rebellion occupies such a reverential position in the republican mind can be explained not only with reference to the destiny of the succeeding years, but because the rising crystallised so many of the movement's emotional drives in one single event. These primary motivations were encapsulated in the following passage from the proclamation issued by the rebels at the start of the rising:

> In every generation the Irish people have asserted their right to national freedom and sovereignty: six times during the past three hundred years they have asserted it in arms. Standing on that fundamental right and again asserting it in arms in the face of the world, we hereby proclaim the Irish Republic as a sovereign independent state, and we pledge our lives and the lives of our comrades-in-arms to the cause of its freedom, of its welfare, and of its exaltation among the nations.[3]

Here we have the fulfilment of the republican imperative - a desire to express a commitment to a concept of Irish freedom and nationality by using

2. R. O'Bradaigh, 'What is Irish Republicanism?', *The Irish Independent*, 9 Dec. 1970.
3. *Proclamation of the Republic of Ireland*, 1916, reprinted in A. Mitchell and P. O.'Snodaigh (eds.), *Irish Political Documents, 1916-1949* (Dublin, 1985), p. 17.

exemplary military action to maintain continuity with a history of nationalist rebellion. In particular, the twin influences of the apostolic succession and the nationalist vanguard are clearly perceptible. The theme of generational revolt was an idea which weighed heavily with Patrick Pearse. He feared that his countrymen would commit an act of national betrayal by allowing an era to pass without some symbolic affirmation of the rejection of British rule. He scorned the previous generation and its preoccupation with Home Rule for failing to even attempt any demonstration against the British: 'the failure of the last generation has been mean and shameful, and no man has arisen from it to do or say a splendid thing, in virtue of which it shall be forgiven.'[4]

Pearse and his colleagues felt it their duty to shake the Irish people out of their passivity. For this reason the rising was an archetypal elitist intrigue which was evident in the way the Military Council manipulated the Irish Volunteers into an insurrection behind the back of the organisation's leader, Eoin MacNeill. The rebels' faith in the ability of a devout few to regenerate the republican cause was made plain by James Connolly at his court martial:

> Believing that the British Government has no right in Ireland, never had any right in Ireland, and never can have any right in Ireland, the presence, in any one generation of Irishmen, of even a respectable minority ready to die to affirm that truth, makes that Government for ever a usurpation and a crime against human progress.[5]

The most important aspect of Connolly's statement was the declared willingness to die for the republican vision. This is crucial to understanding the effect of 1916. It was not so much the violent act itself which caused the greatest political repercussions, but the executions of 15 of the rebel leaders in the weeks after the rising (there were 97 executions

4. Pearse, *Ghosts*, Parts I-III, *AP*, 17 Sept. 1926.
5. J. Connolly, Statement at Court Martial, 9 May 1916, reprinted in O. Dudley Edwards and B. Ransom (eds.), *James Connolly: Selected Political Writings* (New York, 1974), p. 378.

in all) and the internment of 2000 other Volunteers. The rebellion had been deeply unpopular, but the executions and the subsequent enforcement of martial law were heavily resented. The deaths of the rebels, Pearse and Connolly amongst them, sealed the 1916 rising in the image of sacrificial martyrdom, thereby providing the means by which the movement always hoped it could reawaken the nationalist spirit in the masses. On this occasion the impression of the patriot-martyr did strike an emotional chord. Even moderate nationalists like John Dillon, deputy leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, felt moved to attest that the rebels were not murderers, 'but insurgents who have fought a clean, brave fight, however misguided'.[6] In more committed nationalist circles the impact was intense. Ernie O'Malley, later a renowned guerrilla leader in the Anglo-Irish war, wrote that in the atmosphere immediately after the executions 'a strange love was born that for some was never to die till they lay stiff on the hillside or in quicklime near a barrack wall.'[7]

The public reaction to the executions was a major factor in consolidating opposition to British rule. It was not the only factor. The frustration caused by the failure to implement Home Rule, and discontent with World War One, in particular, the prospect of the extension of conscription to Ireland also aroused much ill-feeling. Disaffection had swelled to an extent that when the general election of December 1918 was held, Sinn Fein, an avowedly separatist party, swept to victory, winning 73 out of the 105 Irish seats in the Westminster Parliament. Sinn Fein's manifesto committed the party to the establishment of a republic and declared that it would stand by the Proclamation of the Provisional Government of 1916. Although Sinn Fein contained republican elements, it was not an overtly physical force party. In spite of its broad pledge to make 'use of any and every

6. Quoted in F. Lyons, *John Dillon* (London, 1968), p. 382.
7. Quoted in C. Duff, *Six Days to Shake an Empire* (London, 1966), p. 225.

means available to render impotent the power of England to hold Ireland'[8] the party primarily advocated withdrawing from Westminster and appealing to the Paris Peace Conference for recognition of Ireland's right to statehood. Sinn Fein's first major act after the election on 21 January 1919, was to set up its own assembly, the Dail Eireann, and declare independence. The key point about the rise of Sinn Fein was that it quantified the widespread antagonism to British rule and lent substance to the republican claim that Ireland was a colony held in subjection against its will. For the first time, political conditions offered republicans the opportunity of developing a strategy with demonstrable evidence to show that the majority of the Irish population shared their fundamental objective - to get rid of the British once and for all.

Transitions in Irish Republican Strategy - The Employment of the Military Instrument in the Anglo-Irish War

The question facing members of Sinn Fein in the few weeks after the 1918 election was how to give effect to their desire for separation, as the British government appeared content to ignore the moves to set up the Dail. In one of the first statements issued after the declaration of independence, the Dail proclaimed that the 'existing state of war, between Ireland and England, can never be ended until Ireland is definitely evacuated by the armed forces of England.'[9] The reference to a pre-existing state of hostilities may have been a rhetorical flourish, but it also intimated that the Dail accepted the need for armed resistance to British rule. Whatever the exact meaning, it was the closest the Dail ever came to a formal declaration of war.

The challenge confronting republicans was how best to employ their military resources to force out the British. Traditionally, republican-

8. *Sinn Fein Election Manifesto*, 1918, reprinted in Mitchell and O'Snodaigh, p. 48.
9. *Dail Eireann Address to the Free Nations of the World*, 21 Jan. 1919, reprinted in Mitchell and O'Snodaigh, p. 59.

nationalists had tended to view war in the conventional terms of brigades and battalions, fixed positions, decisive battles and so on. According to one republican military commentator, this thinking had held sway amongst the Irish Volunteers and that the 1916 rising: 'was the logical outcome of the outlook and training of the Volunteers during the two preceding years. It was a blunt, straightforward opposing of Irish military force to English military force.'[10] In theoretical terms this conception of war was valid. The quickest and most effective way of resolving clashes of power and achieving one's political goals has always been through the destruction of enemy forces in major battles. But given the disparity in military strength between Britain, which could draw on tens of thousands of well equipped armed men, and the few thousand ill trained forces the republicans could muster, the outcome of head-on clashes, as the fate of past rebellions up to 1916 had demonstrated, could never be in real doubt.

In fact, the realities of the military situation prior to 1916 were not lost in all nationalist circles. A group centred around the leadership of the Irish Volunteers under Eoin MacNeill, including people like J.J. O'Connell, Eimar O'Duffy and Bulmer Hobson, were acutely sensitive to the nature of a future conflict with Britain. They frowned on the legends of romantic rebellion. MacNeill, especially, was strongly against committing the Volunteers to any hasty venture of the type that the 1916 conspiritors had in mind.'[11] Hobson had for some years seen the impossibility of openly defying British military power and had developed alternative ideas of passive resistance and non-co-operation which he believed could 'offer an even, steady, invulnerable resistance to all government'.[12] Both Hobson and O'Connell drew up innovatory ideas on tactical doctrine that argued for a

10. Captain, W., 'IRA in 1922', *AP*, 25 March 1927.
11. See M. Tierney, *Eoin MacNeill*, F. Martin (ed.) (Oxford, 1988), p. 165 and p. 190.
12. Quoted in Townshend, *Political Violence in Ireland*, p. 243.

move away from large-scale confrontations towards more mobile forms of warfare using smaller military formations which would involve smaller actions but minimise losses in combat.'[13]

Possibly the most significant shift in the process of republican strategic thought was due, not to any formal reassessments of military technique, but a broader, less specific change in attitude amongst the Volunteers who returned home after their release from internment. The stimulus for change had been summed up by John MacBride, a rebel deputy commmander in the Easter rising who, in a valedictory statement before he surrendered, told his comrades never again to allow themselves 'to be cooped up inside the walls of a building again'.[14] During their internment some of the Volunteers like Michael Collins and Cathal Brugha had time to reflect on the essence of MacBride's words. They emerged from the camps with serious reservations about the conduct of the Easter rising. Collins, for instance, considered the rising to have been disorganised while some like Brugha felt that a secretive conspiritorial group like the IRB could no longer provide a viable basis for a military challenge.'[15] Upon their return to Ireland at the end of 1916 the ex-internees set about reorganising the Volunteers. A better regional network was established and plans were once more formulated to resist the introduction of conscription.'[16] Yet there was still no real comprehension of the need for a switch in tactical emphasis towards a more guerrilla orientated approach. Most were still inclined to view a future war in the conventional terms of static positions.'[17] What had changed with

13. See *Ibid.*, pp. 289-290.
14. Quoted in G. Hayes-McCoy, 'A Military History of the Rising', in Nowlan, *The Making of 1916*, p. 300.
15. T. Hachy, *Britain and Irish Separatism* (Washington, 1977), p. 195. See also, D. Lynch and F. O'Donoghue, *The IRB and the 1916 Uprising* (Cork, n.d.), p. 32.
16. See T. Gray, *The Irish Answer* (London, 1966), pp. 61-65 and T. Bowden, *The Breakdown of Public Security* (London, 1977), pp. 84-88.
17. G. Hayes-McCoy, 'The Conduct of the Anglo-Irish War', in T. Desmond Williams (ed.), *The Irish Struggle* (London, 1966), pp. 60-61.

the new wave of republican leaders, was the recognition that if the military instrument was to be employed effectively a very different style of warfare would have to be waged compared to what had gone before. Romanticised visions of gallantly futile stands in the face of British military might would have to be banished. Instead, a future conflict would call for a more surreptitious and ruthless attitude. An indication of what republican leaders envisaged was given by Richard Mulcahy, later to become Chief of Staff of the Volunteers, while he was interned:

> Freedom will never come without a revolution, but I fear the Irish people are too soft for that. To have a real revolution, you must have bloody fierce-minded men who do not care a scrap for death or bloodshed. A real revolution is not a job for children or for saints or scholars. In the course of revolution, any man, woman or child who is not with you is against you. Shoot them and be damned to them.'[18]

Although by 1918 republican strategy was still not defined to any great degree, Mulcahy's remarks did suggest the lines along which the movement's thinking would progress. The core of the evolving strategy centred, not simply on the search for the technical means to achieve a margin of military advantage in combat, but in confronting Britain on a psychological plane. If republicans could synthesise the military instrument with perhaps their most formidable asset, namely, the unflinching single-mindedness in pursuit of their objectives, they could begin to pressurise perceived weaknesses in the British position. By exchanging decisive battles for the prospect of more stubborn and ferocious forms of warfare, republicans could hope to demonstrate a more aggressive commitment to removing the British *vis-a-vis* Britain's comparable resolve to maintain its interests in Ireland. This represents only the bare mental frame of republican strategic thinking as it appeared to be taking shape towards the beginning of 1919. It would be, primarily, the hard-edge of practical experience and necessity rather than pre-planned conceptions that would do most to mould the republican movement

18. Quoted in S. O'Mahoney, *Frongoch: University of Revolution* (Dublin, 1987), p. 67.

into an effective guerrilla force. However, the more realistic and tractable attitudes that prevailed in the republican leadership after the 1916 rising enabled the evolution of new military methods to be absorbed easily into republican strategic doctrine.

In the months following the beginning of 1919 the military instrument developed in a rather *ad hoc* fashion from Volunteer raids on police stations which were carried out in order to steal weapons. It was from these small-scale attacks that Ireland slid into the conflict now known as the Anglo-Irish war. The killing of two policemen guarding a load of gelignite at Soloheadbeg, Co. Tipperary, on 21 January 1919 is often taken as the start of the war, though in fact there had been sporadic Volunteer attacks since 1918. It was not just the brutality of the Soloheadbeg incident which marked it out as the starting point, so much as its timing, occurring as it did on the same day that the Dail met to declare independence. Taking its cue from the 'state of war' said to exist by the Dail, the Volunteer journal, *An t-Oglach* announced on 31 January that 'as the principle means at the command of the Irish people', the Volunteers would be entitled to 'use all legitimate methods of warfare against the soldiers and policemen of the English usurper, and to slay them if it is necessary to do so in order to overcome their resistance.'[19]

The raids against police barracks broadened into a more concerted campaign of violence and intimidation against the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC). Many barracks, especially in country areas, were abandoned. Between January 1919 to October 1920 some 492 vacated barracks were destroyed, a further 21 occupied barracks had also been destroyed and 117 RIC men had been killed.[20] By July 1921 there had been 2000 resignations

19. *An t-Oglach*, 31 Jan. 1919, reprinted in A. Hepburn (ed.), *The Conflict of Nationality in Modern Ireland* (London, 1980), pp. 112-113.
20. Statement by Lord Curzon to Parliament, 20 Oct. 1920, reprinted in Mitchell and O'Snodaigh, p. 85.

from the force and recruitment was badly hit.[21] The RIC's retreat from the countryside often ceded partial control to the IRA. In some areas the Dail attempted to substitute its own legal and administrative structures like republican law courts and police.[22] In tandem with the overt conflict against the RIC, the Volunteers, now increasingly referred to as the IRA, established an effective network of informers which extended into G Division of the Dublin Metropolitan Police, the department responsible for dealing with subversive activities, and even reached as far as the centre of government in Ireland, Dublin Castle. In addition, the IRA's Director of Intelligence, Michael Collins, set up an assassination squad to eliminate British agents. The most renowned enterprise undertaken by Collins' men was the killing of 13 suspected agents on 20 November 1920, an incident known as 'Bloody Sunday'. Taken together, these measures effectively neutralised the RIC as a counter-insurgency force. The destruction of the British intelligence network also shut-off the flow of information to the RIC and further eroded Britain's ability to strike at the IRA. Indeed, towards the end of 1920 more audacious operations were carried out against army and police patrols. Many of these attacks were undertaken by what became known as flying columns, full-time mobile units which engaged in fast offensive operations from concealed bases.[23] Although flying column attacks were rarely very destructive, they did succeed in keeping the countryside in turmoil which necessitated the strengthening of armed escorts, thereby adding to the strain imposed on the British.[24]

The history of the IRA's activities in the Anglo-Irish war have been covered extensively elsewhere and requires no elaboration beyond the details

21. J. O'Beirne Ranelagh, *A Short History of Ireland* (Cambridge, 1983), p. 194.
22. See M. McManus, *Eamon de Valera* (London, 1944), p. 63.
23. See L. Deasy, *Towards Free Ireland* (Dublin, 1973), pp. 154-168.
24. See C. Townshend, *The British Campaign in Ireland, 1919-1921* (Oxford, 1975), pp. 113-114.

already stated. The question we are concerned with here is how, in a figurative sense, can we enclose the IRA's conduct within a strategic framework in a way that will help us comprehend the operation of the military instrument? To form an answer to this question it is necessary to begin with a consideration of the overall power relationship in the war. The key point to bear in mind is that IRA actions, particularly against the RIC, damaged Britain's capacity to govern Ireland through established administrative structures. The attacks did not elminate or neutralise British power so much as undermine civil authority to an extent where Britain was forced back to rely on the crudest expression of that power, namely, coercion. This turn of events was most noticeable in relation to the behaviour of the auxiliary forces which were introduced in Spring 1920 in order to reinforce the police. Elements of these forces, the most notorious of which were the so-called 'Black and Tans', were often indisciplined and easily provoked into reprisals. One American commission, for instance, detailed a litany of misconduct by crown forces, including indiscriminate killings, assassinations of suspected republicans and the wanton ransacking of towns and villages.[25] In spite of the apparent inability of British forces to deal with IRA attacks with anything other than heavy handed repression, the general military situation remained the same. If anything, the arrival of the auxiliary forces substantially increased the military odds against the IRA. The combined strength of crown forces during the conflict, including police, soldiers and auxiliary units, amounted to some 80,000 men. Against this number, the IRA according to Michael Collins, could muster 3000 ill-equipped activists.[26]

The crucial aspect of the conflict for those like Collins was never the

25. Conclusions of the *Interim Report of American Commission on Conditions in Ireland* (Washington, D.C.), March 1921, reprinted in Mitchell and O'Snodaigh, pp. 100-101.
26. M. Foot, 'Revolt, Rebellion, Revolution, Civil War: The Irish Experience', in M. Elliott-Bateman *et al* (eds.), *Revolt to Revolution* (Manchester, 1974), p. 183.

military numbers game, but the fact that the improprieties committed by the crown forces demonstrated the breakdown of civil control which, in turn, hardened Irish opinion against British rule. Collins signified the importance of this point in a newspaper interview in April 1921: 'The terror the British wanted to instil in this country has completely broken down... The people of this country are with us and they do not give a damn what the English do.'[27]

Having gained a rough appreciation of the IRA's progression within a scenario where it was confronted by a numerically superior force, we can now reach a more specific understanding of the strategic mechanics of the military instrument in the Anglo-Irish war. To start with, it is clear that most of the IRA's larger scale military engagements were of a typical guerrilla warfare character. The IRA endeavoured to utilise surprise and mobility to concentrate local forces where tactical advantage could be achieved. At no time did the IRA attempt to defend territory through positional warfare. The reason for this conduct stemmed from the primary need to fight in such a way as to prevent the British from exploiting their military superiority. By dispersing its forces and striking unexpectedly, the IRA could hamper any British attempt to focus their resources on a few decisive areas. If British strength could be sufficiently dissipated trying to protect a vast range of possible targets then the numerical advantage would be all but lost. This line of thought was expressed by *An t-Oglach* which stated: We will strike in our own way, in our own time. If we cannot, by force of arms, drive the enemy out of our country at the present moment, we can help to make his postion impossible and his military activities futile.'[28]

27. M. Collins interview, *Freeman's Journal*, 22 April 1922, reprinted in Mitchell and O'Snodaigh, p. 103
28. Quoted in P. Beaslai, *Michael Collins and the Making of a New Ireland*, Vol. II (London, 1926), p. 383.

The strategy which the IRA sought to practise can be described as one of denial. It attempted to deny Britain the opportunity of waging a war of annihilation for which its forces were most suited. The IRA's broad military aim, however, was more fundamental than simply trying to preserve its own resources by refusing to give battle. The preservation of forces was not designed in order that the IRA could then use its limited potential to gradually eradicate British power through low level operations. There was no chance that the IRA could hope to inflict on the British a military death by a thousand cuts. The British always had the capacity to absorb the relatively small losses imposed by IRA attacks. The crucial point about the strategy of denial was provided by Tom Barry, one of the IRA's best commanders, who said that the 'paramount objective was to survive.'[29] If the IRA could avoid destruction and maintain its ability to strike at British forces, it could prevent any military conclusion from being reached in the short-term. It was in these circumstances that the republicans believed their greatest opportunity lay. The following piece, written in 1927, reflected on the IRA's experience in the war, thus:

> ...guerrilla tactics can never achieve against a regularly organised army a military decision. What they can do is to create what is really a political situation whereby government by the big battalions becomes impossible: a situation that may be dragged out to an indefinite length and that may ultimately achieve for the side adopting these methods, the same result as might be achieved by a decisive military victory.[30]

The efficacy of the republican strategy rested on the political effects of the IRA's campaign. The cumulative political impact both of a steady level of IRA operations and of the British response to those operations, could be interpreted in a way which was suggestive of a number of things; firstly, that Britain's inability to restore civil control implied the lack of popular legitimacy in Ireland for British rule; secondly, that correspondingly, the republican cause enjoyed greater support; and thirdly, that as a

29. Quoted in Townshend, *The British Campaign in Ireland*, p. 66.
30. Captain W., 'IRA in 1922'.

result of both of these implications Britain would continue to face a long drawn out conflict.

Republicans did their best to refine these perceptions in the public mind with an efficient propaganda campaign. The Dail's Publicity Department set up its own newsletter, the *Irish Bulletin*, which was circulated to newspapers and politicians both in Britain and abroad.[31] It is difficult to quantify how far republican propaganda affected opinions in Britain because much unease was already being caused through routine press reportage. The reprisals of the auxiliary forces, such as those in Balbriggan, Trim and Cork, received widespread publicity throughout Britain and America.[32] Elements of the British press, like *The Daily News*, *The Manchester Guardian* and *The Daily Herald*, had been critical of the use of force in Ireland at the outset. After the sacking of Balbriggan on 20 September 1920, the first major reprisal of its kind, some papers like *The Times* and *The Daily Express*, which had previously supported the restoration of order in Ireland, began to question the wisdom of the British government's Irish policy.[33] Other sections of British society like churchmen, opposition leaders and trade unionists also campaigned against the war.[34] Disquiet over the indiscipline of the Black and Tans was even voiced by such notable pro-unionists as the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Sir Henry Wilson.[35] In truth, the fact was that for many, the British position in Ireland had become morally indefensible.

The destabilisation of British opinion represented the apex of the republican strategy. The British government was faced with a major

31. D. Boyce, *Englishmen and Irish Troubles: British Public Opinion and the Making of a New Ireland, 1918-1922* (London, 1972), p. 85.
32. See for example, 'Police Burn Town in County Meath - Explosion in Cork', *The New York Times*, 28 Sept. 1920, reprinted in Mitchell and O'Snodaigh, pp. 82-84.
33. Boyce, pp. 51-53.
34. *Ibid.*, pp. 61-82.
35. F. Pakenham, *Peace by Ordeal* (London, 1935), p. 55.

political embarrassment. Republicans could hope that the threat of further domestic and international censure, and the prospect of a long and costly war would form the conditions in which Britain would seek to re-evaluate its interests in Ireland. The fact that by June 1921 the British government had felt obliged to seek a truce and an end to the conflict was the firmest indication of the effectiveness of this strategy.

Strategy and Bargaining - The Formation of the Anglo-Irish Treaty

A truce arranged between the British and Eamon de Valera, President of the Dail, came into effect on 11 July 1921. Full negotiations between the British and Irish delegations were scheduled for October. Although the truce was technically only a temporary cessation of hostilities, it did in fact mark the end of the Anglo-Irish war. The war had been about the degree of autonomy Ireland should be granted. Britain was not fighting to defend the *status quo*. Home Rule, albeit with the separation of Northern Ireland under the terms of the Government of Ireland Act of 1920, had already been conceded. For republicans, the role of the military instrument in the war had been about the establishment of a strong negotiating position in order to extract the further concessions necessary to accord with their political objectives. In the few months preceding the truce, Collins had spelled out what the republican movement would expect to obtain from its exertions. He told a reporter that the British Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, should recognise the Irish republic. Collins confirmed it was his belief 'that the same effort which would get us Dominion Home Rule would get us a Republic.' He also reiterated Sinn Fein's opposition to the partition of Ireland: 'We do not intend to have Lloyd George put a little red spot on the map of one corner of Ireland and call it part of England, as he does Gibraltar. We want a united Ireland.'[36]

36. M. Collins interview in Mitchell and O'Snodaigh, pp. 103-104.

The main problem in trying to realise the objectives set out by Collins was that the republican movement lacked the means to seize anything tangible from the British with which it could transact in negotiations. As has been mentioned previously both in this and earlier chapters, this difficulty is perhaps the most weighty for comparatively small political organisations to surmount. The republican movement's limited capacity to hold territory was illustrated in the Anglo-Irish war. Despite the Dail's attempts to establish its own administrative zones to give the otherwise symbolic republic some substance, republican government was effective only in remote parts of the South West of Ireland. The rest of the region was held firmly under martial law.[37] As a result, the republican movement had no choice but to adopt a strategy of limited war bargaining. In this concept of warfare military engagements are, for the weaker side, designed not just to imply the risk of unacceptable financial and military burdens, but for signalling, pressure and control, in order to threaten those more intangible factors which the enemy might hold dear like a settled domestic polity and a clean international reputation.[38] The success of the IRA's strategy rested precisely on the skill with which the military instrument was manipulated to demonstrate to the British that their civil writ had broken down in many parts of Ireland and that a high political, as well as financial, price would be exacted for the continuation of their rule. The IRA had been able to raise the level of violence to a point where existing tensions in British society over Irish policy were further sharpened. IRA actions also helped convince the British government that its measures were not having the desired impact on the level of IRA operations. Towards the end of Spring 1921 the number of IRA attacks had risen from a previous average of about

37. See Bowyer Bell, *The Secret Army*, p. 24.
38. See R. Brown, 'Limited War', in C. McInnes and G. Sheffield (eds.), *Warfare in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1988), pp. 174-175.

30 a week to 55.[39] Moreover, it was calculated that the pacification of Ireland would require a commitment of Boer War proportions: a raising of troop levels to 100,000 men, the establishment of security zones, massive ground sweeps, and so on, at a probable cost of around £100 million per annum.[40] Overall, the British came to terms with the republican movement, not because the physical costs of maintaining a form of control underpinned by a substantial military presence was necessarily intolerable, but because the estimate of the future costs of suppression appeared unreasonable in the light of possibly more amenable ways to preserve their interests in Ireland through the re-definition of political relations between the two countries. This is an essential point, because although the treaty settlement of December 1921 reflected the extent of the IRA's success, it was also a reflection of the underlying power relationships in Ireland and not the ideals of the republican vision.

The main British concession under the terms of the Anglo-Irish Treaty was the provision for the legislative independence of the newly created Irish Free State. The province of Northern Ireland, where IRA operations in the war had been insignificant, was given the right to remain separate. The monarchy was to remain the head of the Free State and an oath of allegiance was to be sworn by all those who wished to participate in constitutional politics. The Treaty also allowed Britain to retain control of a number of naval installations. In other words, the Treaty fell some way short of Collins' confident expectations of a fully united and independent republic. This was because the Treaty was an expression of altered political circumstances and not any basic shift in the relative strengths of the two belligerents. Regardless of the optimistic rhetoric about the attainment of a republic, the Irish delegation in the negotiations, of which

39. Townshend, *The British Campaign in Ireland*, p. 180.
40. O. MacDonagh, *Ireland* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1968), p. 88.

Collins was a prominent member, were aware both of the reality of British power and the comparative weakness of the Irish military position. It was Collins, above all, who proved the arch-pragmatist, as his review of the war revealed:

> We took as much of the government of Ireland out of the hands of the enemy as we could, but we could not grasp all of it because he used the whole of his forces to prevent us doing so, and we were unable to beat him out of the country by force of arms. But neither had he beaten us. We had made Ireland too uncomfortable for him... The British had not surrendered and had no need to agree to humiliating terms any more than we would have done. It was time for a settlement that would secure for us their withdrawal and evacuation. There was duress, of course. On their side, the pressure of world opinion to conform their practice to their professions. On our side, the duress the weaker nation suffers against the stronger, the duress to accept really substantial terms.[41]

Collins' analysis provides an accurate impression of the pressures with which he and his colleagues in the Irish delegation had to contend. For the Irish plenipotentiaries, the IRA's military campaign had established a very particular negotiating advantage. It derived not from the literal inability of the British to apply their superior strength, but from the fact that because of the way in which the IRA had fought, the British government had been placed in a decidedly awkward political position. The guerrilla tactics employed by the IRA, and the effectiveness with which British intelligence in Ireland had been neutralised, had made it difficult for the police and army to detect and destroy the IRA's military capacity. The only way that the republican insurgency could have been extinguished would have been through the wholesale subjugation of Ireland which would have starkly identified Britain in the role of the colonial oppressor.

Theoretically, though, there were few military-technical barriers to obstruct the British from imposing an even harsher security regime. Indeed, throughout the war, the British military commander, General Macready, had pressed for the full introduction of martial law all over the country.[42]

41. Quoted in L. O'Broin, *Michael Collins* (Dublin, 1980), p. 84.
42. T. Bowden, 'Ireland: Decay of Control', in Elliott-Bateman, *et al*, pp. 225-226.

The British government refused as it was anxious to avoid any measure that would appear to confer belligerent status on the IRA. Such moves, it was believed, would indicate Britain's inability to contain the situation, while also suggesting that the IRA was an authentic expression of Irish national will.[43] Furthermore, it seems that the British were genuinely expecting a fairly short policing operation against a gang of hoodlums.[44] Once it became clear that the degree of support for the IRA had been underestimated and the resultant security measures implemented inadequate, the government felt unable to embrace stronger methods through fear of alienating British public opinion.[45] Consequently, the British response to the protraction of the conflict was both half-hearted and counter-productive.

To summarise, it was political inhibition and not anything intrinsic to IRA military actions which persuaded the British to negotiate. The British could use the fact of their continued military superiority as an item in their favour, because, to paraphrase the principle described by T.C. Schelling, the threat of violence held in reserve can sometimes be of more significance in limited war situations than the commitment of forces in battle.[46] During the negotiations Lloyd George put this principle into effect by threatening the resumption of massive war unless the Irish delegation came to terms. Under such duress, to which Collins admitted in the passage above, the delegation agreed to sign the Treaty.[47]

The decision to accept the Treaty was reinforced by Collins' pessimistic assessment of the IRA's prospects should the war have been resumed. In the months before the truce the IRA had begun to come under severe pressure. Civilian morale had been affected by the reprisals of the crown

43. See Townshend, *Political Violence in Ireland*, p. 353.
44. See D. Boyce, 'Water for the Fish: Terrorism and Public Opinion', in Y. Alexander and A. O'Day (eds.), *Terrorism in Ireland*, p. 153.
45. Townshend, *The British Campaign in Ireland*, pp. 203-204.
46. Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, p. 143.
47. D. Macardle, *The Irish Republic* (London, 1937), pp. 640-641.

forces, and as a result, citizens were more wary of co-operating with the IRA.[48] Also, the IRA became more vulnerable as the British intelligence system recovered from its initial setbacks. Of greatest immediate concern was the acute shortage of arms. For example one commander, Liam Lynch, told Collins that the shortage in the Cork area had become critical.[49] Collins is even said to have remarked that the British had been mad to offer a truce when they did, as the IRA would not have lasted another three weeks.[50]

Collins' appraisal was probably coloured by the condition of the IRA in Dublin which was close to breaking point, whereas the situation in the rest of the country varied from area to area.[51] None of this detracted from the decision to negotiate. The IRA did not have the power to force its terms on the British. Therefore, talks with the British were a necessity if republicans wished to advance towards their objectives. However, the timing of the truce was crucial. The point was that the IRA had survived long enough for Britain's will to falter first. This gave the republicans an important psychological edge in the negotiations which they could exploit to gain concessions. To have continued the war for the sake of it, especially as the IRA had reached, and arguably already passed its optimum operational capacity,[52] would have been futile as it would merely have weakened the republican negotiating position. What Michael Collins and his pragmatic associates understood, was that at the political level the type of war in which they had been engaged was essentially a bargaining process where threats and counter threats could be traded. Some of Collins' more purist compatriots found themselves unable to relate to this conception of warfare.

48. MacDonagh, p. 87.
49. E. Holt, *Protest in Arms* (London, 1960), p. 355.
50. F. Lyons, *Ireland Since the Famine* (London, 1971), p. 425.
51. Townshend, *The British Campaign in Ireland*, p. 192.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 193.

The Treaty Settlement and the Clash of Strategic Perspectives

On 7 January 1922 the Dail ratified the Treaty by 64 votes to 57. A Provisional government was set up under the terms of the Treaty as an interim administration to pave the way for elections to the Free State Parliament. For those who supported the Treaty settlement the period from 1916 to 1921 counted as a solid success. Republicans had shown that by adapting their military methods to harness their traditional strengths of tenacity and fortitude, they could fight a prolonged war against a vastly more powerful opponent and, in so doing, achieve positive political results. The pro-Treatyites regretted that their efforts in the Anglo-Irish war had been unable to secure the republic they desired. However, they tried to place the settlement into some sort of historical perspective. The view of those like Collins was that the tradition of nationalist struggle had not been a remorseless march towards the unfettered independence of a united republic, more a case of sporadic resistance to the slow but inexorable absorption of Irish national identity within British culture. The Treaty halted this process of Anglicisation.[53] It provided for the evacuation of British forces, the creation of a national army, as well as for full internal autonomy over fiscal and social policy. To the pragmatists, all this was far too important to be endangered by some pedantic debate over republican emblems. It was substance which mattered. This did not mean that the pragmatists had abandoned their commitment to a republic. The Treaty was simply a means of stopping the rot. Above all, they saw the Treaty as a device which Ireland could use to extricate itself from British domination in all its manifestations. According to one pro-Treaty newspaper:

> The shortest way to the full Republic is not through barren wrangles over unrealities, but through the path opened by the Treaty. The Republic will not be conjured out of the vasty deep by an incantation: in a world

53. See Lyons, *Ireland Since the Famine*, pp. 442-443.

of might and the use of might it will take shape when a consolidated and united people have evolved the power to assert it.[54]

As indicated by the vote in the Dail, there was a large dissenting minority who remained unconvinced by the pro-Treaty case. For them, the Treaty was no reward for the years of sacrifice. The Free State was not the united, independent republic for which they had been fighting, but merely a partitioned, quasi-autonomous dominion. The anti-Treaty faction were unable to reconcile themselves to the idea that the settlement could be used as a stepping stone to a republic. They regarded the Treaty with dismay, suspicion and bitter hostility. How was it, then, that a Treaty negotiated by appointees of the Dail could prove so unacceptable to such a sizeable part of the republican movement? The answer disclosed not simply shades of disagreement over nuance, timing and direction, but the presence within the same movement of two entirely different modes of thinking and strategic approach.

For the anti-Treatyites the concept of the republic held great meaning. In their view, the republic was an actuality. It had been proclaimed in 1916 and established by the elected representatives of the Dail in 1919. Further, all of those involved with the movement during the Anglo-Irish war had formerly sworn to 'defend the Irish Republic and the Government of the Irish Republic, which is Dail Eireann, against all enemies, foreign and domestic'.[55] Anything which interfered with the notion of the republic was deemed to be an illegal transgression against the lawfully constituted authority in Ireland. The existence of the republic was considered an unalterable fact and asserted vigorously:

> There is only one legitimate Government in Ireland - the Government of the Irish Republic. Even the most extreme of the Slave State [pro-

54. 'Republican Strength - Where it Really Lies', *The Free State*, 22 April 1922.
55. Oath of Allegiance to Dail Eireann, 20 Aug. 1919, reprinted in Mitchell and O'Snodaigh, p. 66.

> Treaty] party admit that the Dail Eireann is the supreme authority in the country. The Irish Republic is the Republic of all Ireland, not twenty-six counties merely, and to it every citizen of Ireland owes allegiance.[56]

It is evident from this belief, that from the point of view of the doctrinaire republicans, the Anglo-Irish war had never been about fighting *for* something - concessions, negotiating positions, compromises etc., but about safeguarding a pre-existing entity. As a consequence, any subsequent political arrangement that failed to sustain the republic would be seen as a humiliation because it would mean the actual loss of something to which they had been supremely committed. For example, speaking in 1925, Eamon de Valera, who led the opposition to the Treaty, stated that he had rejected the settlement because it meant the 'disestablishment of the Republic - the State established on the will of the people - the State which I had been elected to uphold and defend', and because it entailed 'the surrender of the sovereignty of this nation to an outside power'.[57]

The explanation for the anti-Treatyites' attitude can be traced initially, to the monochrome view of Britain's guilt which seemed to prevent republicans from making any allowance for the change in political circumstances brought about by the Anglo-Irish war. Their complete aversion to any form of British influence meant that they found it difficult to distinguish qualitative differences in political relationships between Britain and Ireland. Therefore, a loose connection with Britain was almost as bad as an all engulfing British presence. Of particular concern in this respect was the requirement under the Treaty of an oath of allegiance to the British monarch. This was felt to be especially demeaning, not only because it violated their oath to the republic, but also because it meant accepting a lingering affinity with the evil British empire. What had been the point of two and a half years of war if at the end of it republicans had to swear

56. *The Plain People*, 28 May 1922.
57. E. de Valera, 'Save Ulster for Ireland', *AP*, 4 Dec. 1925.

allegiance to the very enemy they had been fighting to rid from Ireland? 'Are they', the anti-Treatyites enquired of the pragmatists, 'ready to avow that there is a common citizenship, a community of race, of language, of ideas, of ideals, of aspirations, between them and, for instance, the British Black and Tans?'[58] Nor were the anti-Treatyites persuaded by the pragmatists' argument that the oath of allegiance was simply a meaningless formality. 'Mr. Collins... says the Oath is only symbolical. Just so. But the symbol to which he swore fidelity and wants the Irish people to cry "Amen", is the symbol of England's sovereignty in Ireland.'[59]

The conviction of the doctrinaire republicans that clauses in the Treaty, like the oath of allegiance, were not simply trivial affectations to satisfy Britain's pretence at imperial control, but were absolute and binding, ruled out any thought that the Treaty could be built on in the future. One anti-Treaty publication declared: 'The people who talk of the Free State being a step towards the Republic do not realise the almost utter impossibility of raising Ireland from the status of a partly contented country whose highest and noblest rights and interests are denied, to the full status of sovereign independence.'[60] Exhibited here are various overtones, noted in the previous chapter, which indicate that the doctrinaires' stand over the Treaty arose from a mixture of nationalist-elitism, suspicion of Britain and unwavering loyalty to the republican vision. The 'no-half-way-house' attitude of many republicans suggested that the extension of the Treaty would be hopeless because it had been specifically designed to preserve British interests by staving off full Irish independence. As a result, the Treaty was not an advance but a step back because once British concessions had defused the nationalist threat, the Irish people would lose the inclination

58. 'Things to Think About - The Oath', *The Plain People*, 9 April 1922.
59. *Ibid.*.
60. 'Is the Free State a Step Towards the Republic?', *The Nation*, No. 5, 1922 (*c.* mid-1922).

to seek the real republic. In the doctrinaires' highly polarised view, the Treaty was nothing more than a dead-end which undermined all the principles of republicanism.

To the pro-Treaty faction all this was incomprehensible. They were sceptical of the contention that the Treaty would somehow legally oblige Ireland in perpetuity to relinquish any claim to greater independence. Would those anti-Treatyites who propounded this view, the pragmatists asked, feel duty bound themselves to abide by such an obligation? Not even the most rigid republican was reckoned to be that naive. The pragmatists sensed that the argument was merely a scare story to dissuade people from voting for pro-Treaty candidates in the parliamentary elections due in June 1922. Supporters of the Treaty predicted, accurately as it turned out, that the 'very men who assert now that the Treaty will bind Ireland in honour for ever will assert the contrary as soon as the elections are over.'[61]

More consequentially, the pragmatists saw in the anti-Treatyite position an obsessive concern for 'theories and abstractions which for the sake of appearing to preserve a sham is ready to enter into a covenant of eternal association with England.'[62] How could anyone, they wondered, be so preoccupied with something which did not exist except in the symbolic form of proclamations, declarations and a few gestures at republican government during the Anglo-Irish war? The republic was an aspiration. It was never a power-reality. 'The enemy were pushed back from the unchallenged usurpation of the functions of civil government into standing on naked military strength', said an article in *The Free State*, 'But they had the military strength and they stood on it. There was no town in Ireland where our flag could fly with impunity for a day'.[63] To profess blind adherence to a mythical republic was not regarded as a quaint act of loyality to an

61. 'The "Trust to Luck" Policy', *The Free State*, 4 March 1922.
62. E. de Blaghd, 'The Fenian Faith', *The Free State*, 18 March 1922.
63. 'Fidelity or Foolishness?', *The Free State*, 29 July 1922.

inspiring dream but a dangerous inability to separate the ideal from reality: the failure to discriminate what were essentially propaganda moves intended to influence world opinion from the fact that a functioning, sovereign republic had not been established as a power political reality.

The pragmatists refuted any suggestion that their arguments were based on the lame acceptance of Irish impotence in the face of British opposition and the foreswearing of any right to pursue republican goals. Their reasoning was that as the republic never physically existed then the ideal could not have been betrayed. Nor could the Treaty kill it as an aspiration. Their position over the Treaty was outlined thus: 'The continuance of the struggle for independence is a question of tactics. It is not a question of principle... All tactics must be judged by their success, and the key to success is adaptability.'[64] This statement is significant as it indicated that the debate over the rather distractive issues of the oath and the materiality of the republic, masked a more serious dispute over differing perceptions of power and the extent of the utility of violence in the political process. As time went on, it became clear that the clash was so fundamental that it would not be resolved without further conflict. Therein lay the path which would lead Ireland to civil war.

Although dogmatic loyalty to an indefinite republic was one of the primary reasons which stoked up antipathy to the Treaty, the doctrinaire faction also believed firmly that the success of the IRA's military campaign should have enabled the movement to have gained its full demands. They assumed it was only the actions of the weak-willed Irish delegation that threw away this opportunity. One republican writer claimed that guerrilla methods had 'brought victory within our grasp and placed the nation in the same position that a victory in the field would have done.' He continued: 'The methods did not fail, the men who should have reaped the harvest sown

64. *Ibid.*.

by these same methods did.'[65] This allegation represents the crux of the anti-Treatyites' critique. It also touches on some of the key components of strategic theory. So what is the validity of the claim that the Treaty supporters threw away the elements of victory? Taking war in its simplest abstract form as a clash between two equally matched belligerents, the outcome will be largely determined by the value each side places on winning the contested object over which the conflict is being fought. Quite simply, the belligerent which is more prepared to commit all its effort and resources to vanquish the enemy in battle is likely to be victorious. But the situation is more complicated in a conflict between two obviously unequal sides as in the Anglo-Irish war. From the standpoint of the physically weaker side, the most favourable fighting conditions which it could expect to achieve would be a prolongation of the war and, in the process, hope that the stronger opponent would refrain from exercising its military superiority. If such a stalemate ensues, the materially inferior side can claim a form of psychological victory for holding the stronger side at bay. However, this does not equate to a victory on the field of battle, as the anti-Treatyites presumed, where one sides' capacity for physical resistance has been eliminated through the destruction of its forces and where the victor can prescribe the terms of settlement. Instead, if an inconclusive military situation arises, the belligerents may well try to reach a settlement using the advantages in their respective positions to gain concessions and preserve interests in order to obtain for themselves the best deal possible. Inevitably, any compromise will be an imperfect but tolerable situation for both sides. The point is that under the rational actor model, with each side trying to maximise its own interests, if no outright victory has been achieved then any overall settlement is always likely to be an expression of

65. Captain W., 'IRA in 1922'.

a politico-military situation in which neither side has been able to prevail over the other.

It seems plain that the anti-Treaty republicans identified military indecision with total victory in war. We can see this connection in the following anti-Treaty pronouncement: 'The English can never come back. Ireland beat the Tyrant to a standstill last year. England only made a truce because she could not fight on. England will never come back.'[66] The association of a military standstill with the idea that the enemy *could* not fight on, infers that as far as the doctrinaire republicans were concerned, the truce had been offered, not out of any British reluctance to further embroil themselves in a small but politically damaging conflict, but because Britain had been physically compelled to discontinue the fight. The supposition seemed to gel in the minds of many republicans that the truce signified Britain's defeat and willingness to give in. Looking at the situation from a republican angle, it is easy to understand how such a perception might have arisen. After years of prevarication and obstruction over the issue of Irish self-government, the IRA's military campaign had forced the British to relinquish the greater part of their control over Irish affairs. By any standard this was a major accomplishment. It cannot be surprising that many republicans felt it their right to dictate terms. That any thought of reneging on the demand for full independence was so repugnant to republican hardliners, can be attributed, in part, to the belief that it would be impossible to sell-out an overwhelmingly advantageous military position. In reality, of course, circumstances were far more ambiguous.

One revolutionary theorist of the late twentieth century has pointed out that tactical successes can lead political groups, particularly those fighting against more powerful enemies, into thinking that they are stronger than they really are. If this happens, operational effectiveness can be

66. 'Will the English Come Back?', *The Nation*, No. 2, 1922.

confused with strategic victory.[67] In the same way, one can surmise that the successful execution of most IRA operations in the Anglo-Irish war may well have led many republicans to overstate the impact of their military campaign. Since the IRA's actions had not diminished British military power to any significant degree, it was improbable that Britain would have conceded in peace what had not been won in war. So it was to be expected that Britain would use the fact of its continuing military might in Ireland to bargain down any demand for a full republic. As a consequence, during the tough negotiations in London between October and December 1921, the British were able to remind the Irish delegation of the true scale of the IRA's military achievement, which, as one delegate, Richard Mulcahy, reiterated to his colleagues in the Dail, had been no more than to chase the British out of a few 'fairly good sized police barracks.'[68]

Another aspect of the anti-Treatyites' inflated impression of republican power sprang from the apparent conviction that the communication of threat flowed only in one direction - from the IRA to the British. This seemed to inform the rather curious notion that while republicans were entitled to exert the maximum leverage earned by their military efforts to demand what they liked, the British should somehow not be similarly permitted to use their superior strength on the ground to protect their own interests. The effect was to render hardline republican elements oblivious to any idea that the British could themselves pressurise the Irish delegates to reach a political settlement which fell short of a republic. This was demonstrated by remarks made by Austin Stack, an opponent of the Treaty, who recalled that at the Dail Cabinet's first meeting after the signing of the Treaty, 'Mr. [Arthur] Griffith [the leader of the Irish delegation], if I remember aright, would not admit duress by the British. Mr. Collins said if there was

67. See A. Guillen, *Philosophy of the Urban Guerrilla*, trans. D. Hodges (New York, 1973), pp. 266-267.
68. Quoted in Kee, *The Green Flag*, p. 719.

duress it was only the "duress of facts", whatever he meant by that.'[69]

When it became clear to the anti-Treatyites that Britain had indeed used the 'duress of facts' to force the Irish delegation to sign the Treaty, they came up with the even more exotic allegation that the Treaty was invalid because it did not represent the true aspirations of the Irish people. In 1926 de Valera restated the basis of the argument: 'We again challenge those who proclaim that this State has been established by the will of the Irish people, to allow a plebiscite to be taken with the threat of force removed'. De Valera believed that, 'even those who accepted the Treaty had only done so under the threat of "immediate and terrible war."'[70] It was this kind of simplistic attitude towards the political process which so exasperated the pragmatists. The doctrinaire view was treated with scorn. How could popular opinion be gauged, they asked, without regard to outside factors?

> The national will, according to this theory, must not be based on a consideration of existing facts but must be interpreted as being what the people might be expected to wish if these unpleasant facts were non-existent, and if the national will were functioning *in vacuo*, free from all external influence or pressure.[71]

It was erroneous, therefore, to assert that political decisions could be decided in the context of a 'national vacuum'. Such a context, if it had any basis in reality at all, could only come about through the wholesale defeat of the enemy. Plainly, since the republican movement had not performed such a military feat, then public approval for the Treaty could not be measured against some abstract ideal. In these circumstances, the pragmatists reasoned, 'the will of the people recognises perforce, as does the will of an individual, the limitations of physical conditions.'[72] The hard truth, as the pragmatists saw it, was that there was no option but to

69. Quoted in Pakenham, p. 331.
70. E. de Valera, 'The Work Before Ireland', *AP*, 15 Jan. 1926.
71. 'The Nation's Will', *The Free State*, 4 March 1922.
72. *Ibid.*

accept the fact of Ireland's comparative weakness: 'there is no doubt', said *The Free State*, 'as to where the preponderance of power lay when the Dail decided to go to London to talk about a settlement.'[73] Accordingly, the pragmatists acknowledged that the Irish plenipotentiaries were sent to London 'to get the best terms possible but with practically no hope of bringing back an ideal Republic.'[74]

It is also worth pointing out here that the central inconsistency in the doctrinaire republican position was to consent to talks in the first place. If a republic was the minimum guarantee acceptable to the republican movement, nothing being negotiable up to that point, then logic demanded that the war should have been continued until this principle had been conceded. Yet the very act of agreeing to the truce and to the peace talks signalled that both sides were willing to retreat from their previous rhetorical positions. The pragmatists called attention to the fact that de Valera 'did not stipulate recognition of the Irish Republic as a basis for the Peace parleys.'[75] The farthest de Valera went in setting pre-conditions was to tell Lloyd George that there could be no satisfactory outcome to the talks if the British denied 'Ireland's essential unity and set aside the principle of national self-determination.'[76] In the end, de Valera accepted the British invitation to negotiate on the even vaguer proposition of 'ascertaining how the association of Ireland with the community of Nations known as the British Empire may be best reconciled with Irish national aspirations.'[77]

As may be clear already, the anti-Treaty followers were not simply

73. 'Fidelity or Foolishness?'
74. 'What the People Think About the Delegation', *The Free State*, 22 April 1922.
75. 'The Gamblers and the Dangers of Their Game', *The Free State*, 4 March 1922.
76. Correspondence from E. de Valera to D. Lloyd George, 28 June 1921, reprinted in Mitchell and O'Snodaigh, p. 113.
77. *Ibid.*, 30 Sept. 1921, p. 115.

confused over the approach to the negotiations, but appeared to have *no* concept of negotiations. This outlook extended back to the apparent inability of the doctrinaires to comprehend that in the type of conflict in which they were involved, war was essentially a political bargaining process where threat and counter-threat are exchanged to induce conciliation and concession. One leading theorist of limited war, Thomas Schelling, has written:

> To think of war as a bargaining process is uncongenial to some of us. Bargaining with violence smacks of violence, extortion, vicious politics, callous diplomacy and everything indecent, illegal or uncivilised... Bargaining also smacks of appeasement, of politics and diplomacy, of accommodation or collaboration with the enemy, of selling out and compromising, of everything weak and irresolute.[78]

These allusions to some of the perceived distasteful aspects of bargaining with violence represent an accurate approximation of the suspicion with which many doctrinaire republicans regarded the relationship between force and politics. Indeed, their antagonism towards the Treaty was seemingly predicated on the outright mistrust of the nature of the political process itself; the belief that the Irish delegation had been undercut less by the frailty in the republican military position so much as the artful perfidy of British diplomacy and the gullibility of the delegates themselves. The politicians in the British delegation, de Valera once declared, 'treated their pledges and their promises as scraps of paper to be flung to the wind.'[79] The disillusion in republican ranks, the feeling that they had been tricked out of their advantageous position, was certainly a factor which reinforced the traditional view of the political environment as one of improbity and duplicity. The ideological root of the misgivings concerning peaceful political discourse can be traced back to the unconditional nature of republican ideology. The doctrinaire view of the political arena, in so far as they had any well-formed ideas on the subject, was that it lay in the orbit of

78. Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, pp. 215-216.
79. De Valera, 'Save Ulster for Ireland'.

absolutes which demanded the complete fulfilment of all political objectives in one go. The Treaty offended against republican shibboleths as it adulterated the doctrinaire ideal by compromising with the vile British enemy. Overall, the controversy surrounding the negotiations and settlement of 1921, provides an illuminating contrast between a strategic interpretation of the Anglo-Irish Treaty, as represented by the pragmatists, and the doctrinaire approach which was unable to address how to get around British power, as it theoretically excluded any thought of tactical compromise, no matter how small or temporary, because anything short of the absolute was considered an irredeemable defeat.

The Exposure of the Weaknesses in IRA Strategy in the Civil War

In spite of the objections to the Treaty, it was never made clear by the doctrinaire republicans how they proposed to extract better terms from the British. Instead, the anti-Treatyites sustained their opposition with nebulous appeals such as that contained in *The Nation* which promised that 'if the Republicans win out', then the, 'rotteness of British imperialism will no longer corrupt the hearts of the weak people here.' *The Nation* went on: 'Think what a rapid growth of our great nation MUST follow the break with England. Is this not worth any temporary sacrifice?'[80] The pragmatists suspected that 'temporary sacrifice' meant plunging Ireland back into war with Britain without any defined purpose. These suspicions were confirmed by the reported remarks of Eamon de Valera at a meeting in Cork in February 1922, in which he had declared that Ireland should be prepared 'to go another round in the race'.[81] The pro-Treatyites attacked any such intimations of further conflict as an 'insane gamble' that would jeopardise the gains already made under the Treaty 'on the remote chance of our being able

80. 'Civil War the Greater Evil', *The Nation*, No. 2, 1922.
81. 'The Gamblers and the Dangers of their Game'.

to worst England in a physical struggle, in which England this time will not be hampered in her *modus operandi* by any considerations as to what the rest of the world may think.'[82] Later in March, de Valera was even more explicit when he warned that 'in order to achieve freedom' the anti-Treaty IRA would have 'to march over the dead bodies of their own brothers.'[83]

The probability of civil strife suggested by de Valera was really the inevitable result of the intractable divisions over the Treaty. In March 1922 the split between the two republican factions was formalised when a General Convention of the IRA, attended mainly by anti-Treatyites, repudiated the authority of the Dail and elected its own executive. The anti-Treaty IRA, or 'Irregulars' as they were called, set up their headquarters in the centre of Dublin, in an area known as the Four Courts, in defiance of the Free State government. Pressed by the British to deal with the Irregulars, the Free State besieged the Four Courts on 28 June 1922. This signalled the beginning of the Irish civil war which lasted until May 1923 and cost an estimated 600 killed and 3000 wounded.

The Irregulars were quickly driven out of Dublin and back to their strongholds in the South and West, where they reverted to the same type of guerrilla tactics used in the Anglo-Irish war. Yet the outbreak of hostilities exposed the insubstantial nature of the IRA's strategic thinking. There is no conspicuous evidence to indicate that the IRA had any distinct ideas about how to apply the military instrument to achieve its political objectives. The most plausible explanation of the IRA's conduct was that it was attempting to draw Britain back into Ireland. This might have enabled the republican factions to reunite and resist the common enemy.[84] Certainly, the general tenor of anti-Treaty propaganda during the civil war seemed

82. *Ibid.*.
83. E. de Valera, Speech in Kilarney 18 March 1922, in M. Moynihan (ed.), *Speeches and Statements by Eamon de Valera 1917-1973* (Dublin, 1980), pp. 103-104.
84. Beaslai, Vol. II, p. 401.

to imply that this may have been the intention:

> War with united forces against England is preferable to civil war - so the people thought; but [William] Cosgrave [the Free State Prime Minister] does not think so. He who was so timid against the English is most fierce against his fellow countrymen. He who was unwilling to spend the economic resources of war against England cannot bring himself to make peace to save the resources of Ireland, resources which will be wasted in a war against his fellow countrymen, whom he can never beat.[85]

It is difficult to envisage how any plan to reinvolve Britain could have been tenable. The pragmatists had always felt that further conflict with Britain could only end in 'a new parley with the enemy under infinitely worse conditions.'[86] The Free Staters thought that the Irregulars' objective in the civil war was to 'compel the country, thus shattered and disorganised, to take up arms once more against the ordered and disciplined power of the British Empire.'[87] The prospect of fighting a double war, one to unite the republican movement and another against the British, was regarded with horror, as the pro-Treaty newspaper, *The Irish People* emphasised: 'The leaders - the inventors of this policy - can hardly be considered sane. The astonishing thing is that they have succeeded in inducing any sane man to follow them.'[88] The Free State's room for manoeuvre was very limited. With the British unlikely to tolerate any accommodation between the two republican factions which broke the terms of the Treaty, it was unclear how Irregular resistance could have inspired a change in attitude by the Free State. Besides, the very basis of the pragmatists' case rested on the argument that the Treaty gave Ireland the substance of independence and protected the people from armed British reintervention.[89] With their key objectives satisfied, the pragmatists could not realistically be expected to acquiesce to the return of the British. Such a prospect, it was feared, would not only inflict more suffering and hardship, but under such

85. 'Civil War Will Pay the Jobbers', *The Nation*, No. 6, 1922.
86. 'Republican Strength - Where it Really Lies'.
87. 'Futility', *The Irish People*, 23 July 1922.
88. *Ibid.*.
89. 'Irregular Idealism', *The Irish People*, 23 July 1922.

circumstances, the British might even be welcomed back as peace keepers by the bulk of the Irish population.[90]

In actuality, the doctrinaires' alternative to the Treaty did not encompass any concrete design to lead Ireland from the Treaty to something tangibly better, rather they were holding out the profoundly metaphysical reward of maintaining the purity of the republican ideal. Appealing to the Irish people to reject the Treaty, the doctrinaire republicans issued the following entreaty:

> ...you are asked, asked simply, by the historic nation speaking through its protagonists in our time to remain true to the spiritual inheritance of Nationality that has been handed down to you through the ages, and preserve it, and pass it on to your children, pure, unsullied and uncompromised, as you receive it from the men who fought and fell in Easter Week and as they received it from the freedom fighting generations that preceded them.[91]

Similarly, right at the start of the civil war the Irregulars tried to rally support by invoking the devotional mysticism of republican ideology: 'The sacred spirits of the Illustrious Dead are with us in this great struggle. "Death before Dishonour", being an unchanging principle of our national faith as it was theirs, still inspires us to emulate their glorious effort.'[92]

One can gather from the appeals to the tradition of heroic martyrdom that the military instrument, as practised by the IRA in the civil war, was not wielded as a functional tool to make political headway on the Treaty, but as a means of preserving historical continuity in order to make another violent stand to ensure the apostolic succession. This understanding is important as it helps us to comprehend a possible strategic rationale for the doctrinaires' conduct in the civil war. In particular, it helps to answer the question as to why the anti-Treaty IRA continued to prosecute the war for a further ten months in the face of overt public hostility? After all, the Treaty settlement had been ratified by the Dail and approved by the

90. See M. Hopkinson, *Green Against Green* (Dublin, 1988), p. 230 and p. 236.
91. *The Plain People*, 9 April 1922.
92. *Republic of Ireland*, 29 June 1922.

people in the elections of June 1922 which returned a large majority of pro-Treaty representatives. If the doctrinaires were purely interested in making a token stand against the Treaty as a marker for future republican generations, then they could just as well have retired, honour satisfied, after the initial fighting in Dublin. The reason for the IRA's persistence can be discovered with reference to the ideological underpinnings of the republican strategic tradition. Of special relevance in this respect were the concepts of absolutism and the nationalist vanguard. It has been mentioned above that any solution which did not provide for the absolute fulfilment of republican goals was unacceptable in the minds of many doctrinaires. The Treaty was rejected out of hand. It did not matter how public opinion regarded the settlement. Their loyalty was to the republican vision, not to the Irish people. The doctrinaire outlook simply did not admit the possibility that changes in popular attitudes could affect their strategic calculus. So they felt no need to moderate or adapt their views to take account of changing political conditions, because no individual or group had the right to place restrictions on Irish independence, as de Valera stated plainly: 'The majority have no right to do wrong.'[93] In this sense, the civil war meant very different things to each side. For the Free State the central issue of the war was the 'defence of the rights and liberties of the Irish people... against the attempt by an armed band to rule by virtue of their revolvers.'[94] For the anti-Treatyites, the war was the continuation of the eternal struggle between those who wanted the unalloyed republic and those who would traitorously oppose it.

Although many republicans saw their actions as an expression of private morality rather than as an outgrowth of popular feeling, they did believe that a violent stimulus administered to the body politic could also

93. Quoted in J. Curran, *The Birth of the Irish Free State* (Alabama, 1980), p. 231.
94. 'The War Against Gun Rule', *The Irish People*, 16 July 1922.

serve a direct strategic purpose by drawing out the latent republican sympathies of the Irish people. The precedent for this was the 1916 rising which had succeeded in overcoming public hostility to help galvanise the national effort in the Anglo-Irish war. It was the doctrinaires' belief that the 1916 rising had 'washed the scales from the eyes of the Irish people and enabled them again to see, and to follow the path, the only path, that leads to liberty and Independence.'[95] Similarly, the anti-Treatyites hoped that exemplary violence, combined with republican mysticism, would prove as effective in crystallising public support in the civil war as it had been in the Anglo-Irish war. This belief is reflected in the anti-Treatyites' literature during the civil war which was full of 1916 metaphors: 'the Republic consecrated by Pearse and Connolly, and the dearest and noblest of our patriots', proclaimed one anti-Treaty paper, 'is once more fighting for its life. Citizens, defend your Republic.'[96] In the same way, the Irregulars attempted to appeal to the nationalistic feelings of the Free State Army by comparing its role to that of the RIC in the Anglo-Irish war: 'The RIC were Irishmen to whom England gave arms and orders. Are you any better? You know in your hearts Pearse did not die for the British Empire ...Are you going to murder those who carry on their work and the holy cause for which they gave their lives?'[97] By evoking the imagery of republican martyrology, the anti-Treatyites felt they could wean popular sentiment away from the Free State. So the doctrinaire republican perspective did contain a certain strategic logic, though not one which the Free Staters found especially impressive. They heavily criticised the emphasis placed on the role of the republican vanguard in doctrinaire thinking. They argued that most people would reject the false analogies with 1916 and the Anglo-Irish war:

95. 'The IRA Stands True', *The Plain People*, 9 April 1922.
96. 'The Responsibility!', *Republic of Ireland* (Scottish Edition), 28 Oct. 1922.
97. 'To the Free State Soldiers', in *ibid.*.

> In all developments that have taken place since the approval of the Treaty, the Irregulars have shown a singular incapacity to see their own position... They were convinced that they had only to imitate one or two details [of the] tactics of the leaders of 1916 in order to induce an indiscriminating public to accept unquestioningly the theory that they were re-doing the work of the heroic men to whose courage and foresight the success of the past six years is due. They will not get the support and co-operation of the people, they will never be looked upon as the successors of the flying columns which harried the British last year and the year before.[98]

The events of the civil war bore out the pragmatists' analysis by revealing the doctrinaires' flawed assumptions about violence as a mobilising factor. Moreover, the war corroborated the pragmatists' argument about the fragility of the republican military position in the Anglo-Irish war and the constraints which that imposed on the ability to achieve political objectives. It is somewhat paradoxical that while the doctrinaires were readily identifiable as the most bellicose of the two factions, it was the pragmatists' willingness to accept the limitations of the republican capacity for armed conflict with the British which betrayed the far more hard-headed appreciation of the function of the military instrument in the political process. The pragmatists saw themselves as heirs to the old Fenians, whom they asserted 'recognised clearly the influence of force', and who were 'out to beat the enemy and were held back by no unsoldierly scruples.'[99] The Fenians, it was said, cared little for the fantasies of a mythical republic. They were acute realists who were easily reconciled to the harsh world of power politics: 'They knew that in international affairs it is the military position which rules the issue. They did not waste time and eloquence standing oratorically on the Rock of Right.'[100] In the civil war, the Free State applied this philosophy with ruthless efficiency. On 2 October 1922 the Free State instituted special Military Courts to deal with those charged with attacking, or conspiring to attack, the forces of the state. Such

98. 'The People and Guerrilla Tactics', *The Free State*, 29 July 1922.
99. de Blaghd, 'The Fenian Faith'.
100. *Ibid.*.

offences were to be punishable by death, penal servitude, imprisonment, deportation, internment or fines.'[101]

The Irregulars accused the Free State of being 'in exactly the same position as the British Enemy were before the truce... The machinery is the same; the lying propaganda; the midnight terrorism; the murder of prisoners of war: These are England's methods.'[102] Although there were certain similarities, the direct comparison of the Free State's conduct with that of the British in the Anglo-Irish war was inaccurate. For a start, the emergency laws enacted by the Free State were far more repressive and systematically applied than anything introduced by the British. The Free State's policy towards the IRA was ferocious. By the end of the war 77 IRA men had been executed, three times the number executed by the British between 1919 and 1921.[103] Yet the Irregulars' analogy with the repression of the British illustrated the misapprehensions under which their campaign laboured. The crucial point was that the implementation of the Treaty had altered the political climate in Ireland which permitted the Free State to adopt sweeping counter-insurgency measures without incurring the same negative political consequences experienced by the British in the previous two years of fighting. During the Anglo-Irish war, the IRA's greatest asset was the solid backing, or at least toleration, it received from the majority of the Irish people who identified themselves with the IRA's central aim of getting rid of the British. After 1922, with the British gone from most of the country, the IRA found it difficult to sustain the popularity of its cause. With the endorsement of the Treaty at the polls, the Free State leader, William Cosgrave, was prepared to use his mandate to force the IRA to comply with the popular will. He had made his intentions plain at the opening of

101.Free State Proclamation of Military Courts and Offer of Amnesty, 10 Oct. 1922, reprinted in Mitchell and O'Snodaigh, pp. 148-150.
102.'Khaki or Green?', *An Long - War Sheet*, No. 1, 4 Oct. 1922.
103.Kee, p. 744.

the Irish parliament on 11 September 1922:

> The Nation which has struggled so long against the most powerful foreign aggression will not submit to an armed minority which makes war upon its liberties... The National Army is prepared to pay the price, and so are we... There is now no reason why blame should be shifted on the British or any other Government blamed if we do not succeed. This Parliament and this Government is of the People and expects to get that support which is essential to a Government and a Parliament.[104]

In effect, the new political atmosphere which the Treaty ushered in stripped the IRA's strategy of its utility. Bolstered by domestic opinion and by external support from the British, the Free State did not feel constrained in seeking a decisive military victory against the Irregulars. In this context, the IRA's strategy, which aimed to disrupt the popular base of the Free State through low level military actions, became all but meaningless. Such a strategy could only be successfully employed, as in the Anglo-Irish war, as a result of some degree of forebearance on the part of the stronger belligerent which would allow the weaker side to endure and eventually break the opponent's political will. But if the stronger side attaches few self-imposed restraints to its conduct then the conflict will not be presented in these terms as there will be little or no moral dimension for the weaker side to exploit. The war will simply become a contest over who has the ability to commit the greatest military resources to the conflict. If the stronger belligerent is prepared to use its resources in a brutal, and probably, to some extent, indiscriminate fashion, then all the advantages a guerrilla organisation might have enjoyed will disappear as small-scale raids will make little impression on a well armed and determined adversary. This is what happened in the Irish civil war. The fierce suppression of the Irregulars and their sympathisers denied them the opportunity to make political capital out of a protracted conflict as they simply could not *endure* the overwhelming onslaught of the state.

104. Speech by W. Cosgrave at the Opening of the Free State Parliament, 11 Sept. 1922, reprinted in Mitchell and O'Snodaigh, pp. 144-145.

By early 1923, having been subjected to the unrelenting assault of the Free State, the IRA reached the point of exhaustion. The conflict struggled on until late April when the IRA finally succumbed to the inevitable and suspended offensive operations. De Valera, the nominal leader of the anti-Treatyites, told his companions that further resistance would be useless. 'Military victory', he said, 'must be allowed to rest for the moment with those who have destroyed the Republic.'[105]

The end of the Irish civil war brought to a close one of the most impassioned periods in the history of the republican movement. In summary, then, what can we say about the movement's overall strategic development between 1916 and 1923? In the first instance, the 1916 rising solidified republican strategic culture, reinforcing the conviction that the actions of a nationalist elite standing in line as the successors of past republican generations could, through their sacrifices, enthuse the bulk of the Irish people to unite around a broad appeal for freedom. The events from 1916 to 1919 still resonate through the republican movement to this day as it is from this epoch that later republicans would draw the inspiration to continue the fight to complete the unfinished task of national liberation. As one republican tract of the mid-1970s put it, the IRA 'owes its allegiance... to the 32-county independent Irish Republic as proclaimed in 1916 and endorsed by the Dail in 1919. This is not the Free State; it has yet to be achieved.'[106]

The years between 1916 and 1921 also fortified the belief in armed force as the primary means to achieve the republic. For many republicans, the success of the IRA's campaign in the Anglo-Irish war in dislodging the

105.E. de Valera, Declaration at End of Civil War, reprinted in Mitchell O'Snodaigh, p. 163.
106.O'Riain, *Provos: Patriots or Terrorists?*, p. 23.

British from most of Ireland, served to authenticate Pearse's maxim that 'Ireland armed will attain ultimately as much freedom as she wants.'[107] Faith in the military instrument was strengthened as a result of the enormous innovations which took place at the tactical level. The younger, more practical, generation of republican leaders, who emerged in the aftermath of the 1916 rising, were, in the early months of 1919, able to weld the largely extemporaneous violence of bands of Irish Volunteers into a coherent campaign of action. This shifted the entire focus of the republican military outlook. Conventional ideas of massed confrontations and decisive victories were discarded in favour of much smaller military encounters which allowed the movement to fight a war of extended duration. In consequence, the guerrilla tactics of the Anglo-Irish war, the killing of policemen, soldiers, attacks on military, government and economic targets, and so on, became enshrined in republican military methodology.

Ultimately, though, the development of republican strategy in this period can only be described as partial because innovations in military techniques were not accompanied by any new thinking at the political level. It was this point that caused the internal divisions over republican strategy and which led Ireland into civil war. The pragmatists in the movement were able to accept that the new guerrilla orientated strategy could only be used as a limited pressurising tool to extract concessions from the British. In their view, to make advances towards political objectives, republicans would have to show flexibility in their dealings with the British. To the doctrinaires this was heterodoxy. For them, the entrenchment of republican ideology in the wake of the 1916 rising reinforced their antagonism to compromise. Concessions from the British were taken as a sign of the efficacy of violent methods, not as a means of reaching some half-baked deal with their sworn enemy. The failure of the Treaty to live up to the idealism of

107.Quoted in Adams, *A Pathway to Peace*, p. 54.

Pearse, Connolly and all the other republican sages, merely hardened their resolve to carry on.

For that section of the movement calling itself the IRA, which would continue the struggle into the civil war, the period from 1916 to 1921 left it dogmatic, inflexible and unable to detect the limits upon its capacity to achieve its objectives with its chosen methods. For example, as late as April 1923, when it was evident that the IRA was near to defeat, its Chief of Staff, Liam Lynch, still believed victory was possible. Florence O'Donoghue was prompted to comment that Lynch's 'appreciation of the military situation was more optimistic than the facts warranted... He could not and would not face the thought of defeat and collapse of Republican resistance to the imposition of the Treaty.'[108]

What the civil war illustrated above all was the inability of the IRA to critically appraise the utility of armed force in the context in which it sought to practise it. The IRA's campaign appeared to be governed, not with reference to what was realistically attainable through violence, but by ideological imperatives which suggested that the true republic could be achieved through immediate resort to arms with hardly any thought to the consequences, chances of success, or of more effective alternatives. Thus, the IRA ignored one of the most basic strategic principles, that political circumstances will, almost inevitably, affix limits to what is obtainable with the military instrument. This stood in contrast to the IRA's campaign in the Anglo-Irish war. Pragmatic leaders like Michael Collins and Richard Mulcahy were able to appreciate the confines of their strategy. The proficiency of the IRA's campaign between 1919 and 1921 rested on the premise that the more powerful enemy would in some way feel restrained, for political or moral reasons, from bringing the full force of its superiority to bear on its weaker opponent. The skill of the IRA's conduct depended on

108.Quoted in E. Neeson, *The Civil War in Ireland* (Cork, 1966), p. 197.

the manipulation of military engagements to affect political perceptions in Britain to an extent that caused influential sections of British opinion to question the wisdom of Britain's policy in Ireland. Therein lay the main weakness of this type of low intensity strategy, a weakness that the IRA failed to heed in the civil war, which was that the strategy relied exclusively on the exploitation of the psychological, rather than the destructive effects, of armed action, thereby rendering such strategies vulnerable to those who were willing to view the resolution of clashes of interest purely in terms of the tangibles of military power. As Clausewitz noted:

> If the political aims [in war] are small, the motives slight and tensions low, a prudent general may look for any way to avoid major crises and decisive actions, exploit any weaknesses in the opponent's military and political strategy, and reach a peaceful settlement. If his assumptions are sound and promise success we are not entitled to criticise him. But he must never forget he is moving on a devious path where the god of war may catch him unawares.[109]

109.Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 99.

CHAPTER 3

POLITICAL CONTROL VERSUS THE AUTONOMOUS MILITARY INSTRUMENT - IRISH REPUBLICAN STRATEGY FROM THE CIVIL WAR TO 1970

The difficulty the IRA had in the civil war of recognising the limitations of its strategy raises wider questions about the political control of the military instrument. It was stressed in the introduction that one of the fundamental tenets of strategic theory was that for war to be instrumental it cannot exist outside the realms of policy. If the political motive is obliterated then war becomes an independent dynamic practised for its own sake rather than to achieve specific objectives. In fact, the notion of war as an expression of political purpose is a truism. How can it be otherwise? No war has ever been the product of a spontaneous outbreak of meaningless violence. For any belligerent to wage a war, it must have some political rationale. The rationale may not be especially convincing when placed under close scrutiny, but nevertheless, the war will be fought for a particular reason. So when we talk about warfare as a continuation of policy as an issue in strategic theory, we are not arguing about the presence of a political motive, rather, we are questioning the *quality* of the political control exercised in war. The degree of political influence can play a large part in shaping a conflict as the scale of the political demands sought through war will help determine both the military objectives and the effort necessary to achieve them.

The purpose of this chapter, then, will be to explore the relationship within the republican movement between political control and the practice of the military instrument with reference to the period from the 1920s to the early 1970s. The shifting balance between military and political considerations during these decades was to have a crucial effect on the development of republican strategic thinking, the repercussions of which continued to reverberate well beyond the 1970s. Since this chapter covers some 50

years of republican history, it should be underlined that the analysis will not simply be a recitation of IRA activity during this era. The focus of this enquiry will be on key phases within this time frame in order to show how particular tensions and problems of the politico-military relationship impacted on republican strategy and how the movement tried to resolve them.

This chapter begins by assessing the strains which developed between the political and military elements of the republican movement during both the Anglo-Irish war and the Irish civil war. The chapter goes on to chart the decline of political control over the military instrument after the civil war and to explain how this degraded the quality of republican strategic anlaysis over the next four decades. The study also evaluates the attempt to restore a sense of political balance in the 1960s when the IRA leadership undertook an extensive strategic review. Consideration is given to the internal dissension which this review provoked among sections of the movement. In addition, the analysis looks at the extent to which disagreements over strategic priorities were exacerbated by the crisis in Northern Ireland in the late 1960s and how far such disagreements contributed to the split in republican ranks which was to lead to the creation of the Provisional IRA. To finish off, the analysis briefly assesses how the Official IRA mangaged successfully to extricate itself from an overt military posture during the early stages of the Northern Ireland conflict, so leaving the future course of the armed struggle firmly in the hands of the Provisionals.

Unlike political entities like sovereign states where there is usually a clear distinction between executive authority and the armed forces, amongst sub-state groups fighting for power it is often difficult to determine the exact source of political control. However, from the IRA's initial pronouncements at the outset of the Anglo-Irish war the organisation's status within the republican struggle appeared, at first glance, to be quite obvious.

In August 1918, the newspaper *An t-Oglach* said that the Irish Volunteers were a 'military body pure and simple' mere 'agents of the national will.'[1] Similarly, in January 1919 the paper stated that if the Volunteers 'are called on to shed their blood in defence of the new-born Republic, they will not shrink from the sacrifice. For the authority of the nation is behind them, embodied in a lawfully constituted authority'.[2] The implication of such announcements suggested that the 'lawfully constituted authority' resided in the elected representatives of the 'national will', namely, the Dail. In reality, the situation was more complicated. Far from a harmonious symbiosis, the relationship between the Dail and the IRA was ill-defined and tense because for all practical purposes the two were separate organisations following complementary, but unco-ordinated, policies. There was no better illustration of this position than the outbreak of hostilities themselves in early 1919, which took place without approval from the Dail. The Volunteers believed that the election of the Dail and its declaration of independence had given them the right to pursue the republic in the manner they saw fit.[3] This was indicated in the *An t-Oglach* article of January 1919, which declared that the 'state of war' said to exist between Ireland and England in the Dail's first official address was 'a fact which has been recognised and acted on by the Volunteers almost from their inception'.[4]

As IRA raids grew, which in turn stimulated British repression, so the Dail was presented with a *fait accompli*. Increasingly the members of the Dail felt compelled to align themselves with the IRA's campaign. De Valera admitted that there was no formal connection between the Dail and the IRA when in April 1919 he announced that the Dail's Minister of Defence, Cathal

1. Quoted in K. Nowlan, 'Dail Eireann and the Army: Unity and Division', in Williams, *The Irish Struggle*, p. 69.
2. *An t-Oglach*, 31 Jan. 1919, reprinted in Hepburn, *The Conflict of Nationality in Modern Ireland*, p. 112.
3. Townshend, *Political Violence in Ireland*, pp. 331-332.
4. *An t-Oglach*, 31 Jan. 1919, in Hepburn, p. 112.

Brugha, was only in 'close association with the voluntary military forces'.[5] The oath of allegiance to the Dail of August 1919 was administered to the IRA in order to give the impression that the military campaign was politically accountable. In practice, military operations continued unhindered by any political strictures from the Dail. It was only towards the end of the war that the Dail unreservedly accepted responsibility for the IRA's actions. In an interview on 30 March, 1921 de Valera stated:

> The Army of the Republic is a recognised state force under civil control of elected representatives of the people, with an organisation and discipline imposed by these representatives... The Government is, therefore, responsible for the actions of this army. These are not acts of irresponsible individual groups therefore, nor is the IRA, as the enemy would have one believe, a praetorian guard. It is the national army of defence.[6]

The statement was a complete exaggeration of the Dail's influence over the IRA. It was made for propaganda reasons. Without sanction from the Dail, the IRA's campaign could come to be seen by the outside world as an uncontrolled series of sporadic murders rather than the actions of an authentic national-liberation movement. Therefore, by openly endorsing the IRA, the Dail could strengthen its bargaining position, as the image of a unified political and military organisation would make it more difficult for the British to use the negotiating process to drive wedges through the movement.

Although the moves to establish the Dail's seniority were only paper resolutions to put a veneer of political respectability on the military campaign, they were, nevertheless, still resisted by many in the IRA. Even the politically astute Michael Collins was hesitant over the introduction of the Dail's oath of allegiance, fearing it would allow civilian control of military policy.[7] He was later to refer to those in the Dail like, de Valera, as 'irresponsible meddlers'[8] whom he felt were more concerned with criticising

5. Quoted in Hachy, *Britain and Irish Separatism*, p. 269.
6. Quoted in Carty, *Ireland from the Great Famine to the Treaty, 1951-1921*, p. 202.
7. Nowlan, 'Dail Eireann and the Army', p. 70.
8. Quoted in O'Broin, *Michael Collins*, p. 68.

the IRA than with defeating the British. Many IRA members felt it was they who were the leading edge of the struggle. It was they who were taking on the British, suffering the hardship and making the sacrifices. They did not feel the need to cede control of the struggle to anyone outside the IRA, even if it was in name only. The essence of the IRA's attitude was captured by Liam Lynch, who was later to become the organisations' Chief of Staff in the civil war, who remarked that: 'The Army has to hew the way for politics to follow.'[9]

The poor state of intra-republican civil-military relations was sharpened in the months preceding the civil war. It was the firm belief of Rory O'Connor, the leader of the anti-Treaty IRA, that 'the army should be kept apart from politics under separate control'.[10] Indeed, with the repudiation of the Dail in March 1922, and the introduction of a new IRA constitution in April 1922, the IRA arrogated to itself the prerogative to act unilaterally 'to protect the rights and liberties common to the people of Ireland'.[11] During the civil war, following de Valera's recommendation, a republican government was set up in October 1922 to present a political face to the Irish people. De Valera believed that it was necessary to 'provide a rallying point and a centre of direction to co-ordinate various efforts in various fields to maintain the Republic.'[12] Such a government was considered essential to try to win back the support of the people which de Valera recognised was 'by far the greatest weakness of our cause at the moment.'[13] Even so, the republican government was a cosmetic exercise and formed too late to have any effect on anti-Treatyites' position. Real power continued to reside with the IRA Executive. In any case, de Valera's civilian role in

9. Quoted in Kee, *The Green Flag*, p. 661.
10. R. O'Connor, Statement to press, 26 April 1922 cited in Macardle, *The Irish Republic*, p. 725.
11. Quoted in Macardle, p. 721.
12. E. de Valera, Memorandum to IRA Executive, 12 Oct. 1922, reprinted in Mitchell and O'Snodaigh, *Irish Political Documents*, p. 146.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 147.

the civil war aroused just as much suspicion within the ranks of the IRA as it had done in the Anglo-Irish war. Rory O'Connor had even remarked that he was 'no more prepared to stand for de Valera than for the Treaty.'[14] In fact, the formation of the republican government made relations between the civil and military wings worse as de Valera resented having to accept public responsibility for the IRA while being denied any influence over its actions.'[15]

The IRA's conduct during the civil war was a prime demonstration of how the absence of overt political counsel could affect a military organisation's strategy. There is no evidence that the IRA had thought much about how to use its military resources to proceed from the Ireland of the Treaty to the full independence of the true republic. 'Men did not know what they were fighting for', opined the veteran republican, Peadar O'Donnell, about the IRA's campaign in the civil war.'[16] He observed that there was no IRA strategy worth speaking of, only a simple faith that the republic needed to be protected. The 'devout men' of the IRA, as O'Donnell called them, 'were just not capable of coming down from the high ground of the Treaty. On the simple ground of their allegiance to the Republic, such men would have taken their stand and accepted martyrdom.'[17] What O'Donnell was suggesting, was that the IRA's actions did not reflect a coherent plan of action but rather a pre-conditioned ideological reflex to use violence to defend the mythical republic. This was certainly borne out by the IRA's conduct in the war which was bereft of proper planning. For example, the IRA's general headquarters had little control over day-to-day operations which were largely determined by local units.'[18] Yet the IRA's confidence in the efficacy

14. Quoted in Beaslai, *Michael Collins and the Making of a New Ireland*, p. 369.
15. Neeson, *The Civil War in Ireland*, p. 184.
16. Quoted in M. McInerney, *Peadar O'Donnell* (Dublin, 1974), p. 71.
17. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 72.
18. Hopkinson, *Green Against Green*, p. 174.

of force led it to believe that the simple exertion of military pressure, no matter how unco-ordinated, would enable it to dictate terms.'[19]

The lack of political steering destroyed any real hope for the IRA in the civil war, as the vague commitment to expunge British influence and unite Ireland did not inform any readily attainable military objectives. If there are no specific objectives in war then the terms of military success cannot be defined, nor can a basis for compromise or negotiations be established. In all wars individual tactical engagements provide the means to reach intermediate military aims which are themselves the means to obtain the ultimate objective in war. The enunciation of clear and realistic political goals are vital to establish the relationship between the final object in war and the intermediate stages. In this respect, the poor quality of political guidance in the civil war unhinged the IRA's campaign as it was never spelled out how tactical engagements related to the achievement of the overall strategic goal.

The Decline of Political Control Over the Military Instrument in the 1920s and 1930s

Irish republican strategy, then, from the Anglo-Irish war to the civil war evolved, in the main, independently from either internal or external political control. Despite the disaster of the civil war, the experience was to reinforce, rather than dilute, republican idealism in the following years. This was exhibited in the movement's analysis of its failure in the civil war, which focused on narrow problems of tactics and organisation rather than reflecting on whether insufficient political support or the unrealistic expectations of its strategy also played their part. For example, one IRA commander criticised the movement for its use of guerrilla tactics and for not exploiting its superiority in the initial weeks of the war by launching

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 128-129.

an offensive against Free State forces. In his view, the IRA failed because it 'continued to use the methods adopted by the British to meet an entirely changed situation', and because it lacked the 'unifying machinery', such as a general staff, which could co-ordinate 'resources as they should have been used.'[20] So what were the elements which made the republican movement so politically unresponsive, with all the negative effects this implied for the IRA's strategic development over the next twenty years?

The course that the republican movement had charted after the civil war appeared set. Its publicity reaffirmed the belief that it was in 'the armed citizens of the broken nation that the deepest hope of the people rests', and that the movement's duty was to build up the IRA in order 'to pick up again the unfinished task of breaking the British connection'.[21] However, there were more politically minded elements, mainly within the anti-Treaty faction of Sinn Fein under de Valera, who looked for other ways to advance the republican cause. De Valera persuaded the movement to contest the 1923 general election in which Sinn Fein did surprisingly well by winning 44 seats. But the absolutist nature of republican ideology meant that the movement was unable to scan other available options, which in itself was a manifest expression of the lack of political leadership. Unity and sovereignity could only be obtained through armed force. Therefore, the notion of constitutional participation was foreclosed from the start, a fact which inhibited the general fertilisation of political ideas within the movement.

Although Sinn Fein's performance in the 1923 election revealed considerable sympathy for a more nationalistic alternative to the pro-Treaty government of the Cumann na nGaedheal party, abstention from electoral politics held out little prospect of progress within a functioning democracy like the Free State. Many Sinn Fein pragmatists were frustrated by the ideological

20. Captain W., 'IRA in 1922', *AP*, 25 March 1927.
21. 'The Army and its Task', *AP*, 29 Oct. 1926.

rigidities of republican doctrine. It had been evident, even after the split over the Treaty, that sections of the anti-Treatyites were unhappy at the IRA's inability to square its absolute demands for a republic with its actual military capabalities. Dissatisfaction was expressed by de Valera when he wrote during the civil war, in late 1922, that: 'What guerrilla warfare leads to is a desire on our opponents' part to come to terms with us, provided these terms do not mean complete surrender by him to us, which is unfortunately what we require.'[22] The subsequent years in the political wilderness convinced many Sinn Fein members that the opportunities for accomplishing republican goals through the constitutional process were sufficiently substantial to warrant a tactical reassessment. Fundamentally, they believed that force could no longer serve a useful purpose within the structure of the Free State. De Valera argued in 1926, that 'a nation within itself ought to be able to settle its polity so that all occasions of civil conflict between its members may be obviated'.[23]

The pragamatists view implied ditching the policy of abstention and accepting that political flexibility would be necessary to gain popular support for constitutional changes. Clearly, such an advocacy meant traversing the quagmire of traditional republican philosophy which specifically rejected any move that would give recognition to what was regarded as the illegal Southern parliament. At the IRA Convention of November 1925, the merest hint that de Valera and his colleagues were thinking about the possibility of entering the Irish parliament was enough to prompt the IRA to sever its links with Sinn Fein, because, in the words of the resolution:

> ...the Government [Sinn Fein] has developed into a mere political party and has apparently lost sight of the fact that all our energies should be

22. Quoted in Earl of Longford and T. O'Neill, *Eamon de Valera* (London, 1970), p. 210.
23. Quoted in R. Fanning, '"The Rule of Order": Eamon de Valera and the IRA, 1923-40', in J. O'Carroll and J. Murphy (eds.), *De Valera and His Times* (Cork, 1923), p. 161.

> devoted to the all-important work of making the Army efficient so that the renegades who, through a *coup d'etat*, assumed governmental powers in this country be dealt with at the earliest possible opportunity...[24]

The convention consolidated control in the hands of the IRA Executive which further reduced the level of political influence within the movement.

It was inconceivable that the Sinn Fein pragmatists could prosper in surroundings which were so antagonistic to peaceful political involvement. So in 1926, de Valera and his followers withdrew from Sinn Fein to form a new party, Fianna Fail, which entered the Irish parliament on 12 August 1927. Fianna Fail maintained that although force was justified: 'There are times, as we all know when, because the odds are too enormous, or because the opportunity for swift blows for liberty do not exist, the use of force does not further the cause of national independence.' The 'kernel of Fianna Fail policy', the party claimed, 'is to keep open for the people a constitutional way of winning their freedom', but emphasised that the goal remained the same as the IRA's, 'namely, the wresting of the whole of Ireland from foreign control and the establishment there of the full sovereignty of the Irish people.'[25]

Fianna Fail went on to become the mainstream party of the Irish political establishment, enjoying long periods of office under de Valera. When the party first came to power in 1932, it immediately set about whittling away at the Treaty's provisions. The oath of allegiance to the British crown was abolished along with the office of Governor-General. In 1937 a new constitution was introduced which claimed territorial jurisdiction over the whole of Ireland and renamed the country Eire in place of the Irish Free State.

The IRA's attitude to Fianna Fail was initially ambivalent. For a while it seemed that the movement would recognise the party as its *de facto*

24. Draft Agenda for IRA Convention, 20 Nov. 1925, cited in Bowyer Bell, *The Secret Army*, p. 53.
25. 'Force as a Means Towards Irish Freedom', *The Nation*, 14 Jan. 1928.

electoral arm. In mid-1927 the republican movement put forward proposals which would enable the two organisations to co-operate in elections. The IRA demanded that Fianna Fail members should pledge 'that they will not enter any foreign controlled Parliament as a minority or a majority'.[26] Instead, the IRA argued that if Fianna Fail won a majority of seats, a new assembly should be convened which would repudiate the 1921 Treaty. In effect, this meant a continuation of the abstentionist policy. Fianna Fail spurned the IRA plan. In response, the IRA chose to restate its principle belief that the goal of the republic could: 'more surely be achieved by the means set forth in the Constitution, namely: 1 "Force of Arms." 2 "Organising, training and equipping the manhood of Ireland as an effective military force".' In addition, it was reiterated that 'the creation of a revolutionary situation favourable for military action should be supported actively by all Volunteers.'[27] Later, in the early thirties, the IRA openly backed Fianna Fail in the hope that a Fianna Fail regime would be more tolerant of the movements' activities than the Cumman na nGaedheal government.[28] In actuality, though, there was little love lost between the two. Once in office, Fianna Fail called on the IRA to disband. The IRA refused, rejecting 'sentimental and meaningless pleas for unity', on the grounds that 'the ultimate aim upon which the Fianna Fail party was founded - the restoration of the Republic of Ireland - seems to have been lost sight of.'[29]

The rising popularity of Fianna Fail began to erode the republican movement's support. In 1926 the movement was thought to have a membership of around 20-25,000. By 1929 this had fallen to some 5,000.[30] The spectre of impending political obscurity encouraged left-wing republicans,

26. 'Army Council Statement', *AP*, 3 June 1927.
27. *Ibid.*.
28. See 'Oglaigh Na h-Eireann [Irish Republican Army] - Manifesto to the Irish People', *AP*, 14 Jan. 1933.
29. 'The Army Council State Basis for Unity', *AP*, 2 Sept. 1933.
30. Patterson, *The Politics of Illusion*, (London, 1989), p. 46.

like Peadar O'Donnell and George Gilmore, to try to broaden the appeal of the movement by hitching the nationalist standard to social policies which addressed popular grievances. Socialist-republicans initially looked back for inspiration to the writings of Liam Mellows, an IRA member executed by the Free State in the civil war, who had argued for the 'Republican political and military outlooks to be co-ordinated.'[31] To that end he suggested that the Dail's Democratic Programme of 1919, which declared the 'right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland',[32] to be 'translated into something definite' to ensure that the 'great body of the workers are kept on the side of independence.'[33] By the mid-1920s socialist-republicans were becoming increasingly prominent. The break with Sinn Fein in late 1925 was engineered in part by O'Donnell who believed that the party was a traditionalist deadweight which would obstruct moves to radicalise the IRA.[34] In 1931, to facilitate his plans, O'Donnell set up a party of 'Workers and Working Farmers' called Saor Eire, which aimed at the 'mobilisation of the mass of the Irish people behind a Revolutionary Government, for the overthrow of British Imperialism and its allies in Ireland'.[35] Later in 1934 O'Donnell and Gilmore tried to fashion a broader 'anti-imperialist' coalition called the Republican Congress.[36] These developments necessitated some revision in the role of the military instrument. By 1927 commentaries in *An Phoblacht*, of which Peadar O'Donnell was editor, were beginning to question traditional assumptions about the utility of physical force and to indicate the need for a more politically responsive organisation. One article asserted that the 'superficial knowledge which most Irishmen have of their native country has

31. 'What Mellows Wrote in Mountjoy', *AP*, 19 May 1934.
32. Democratic Programme of Dail Eireann (1919), reprinted in Mitchell and O'Snodaigh, pp. 59-60.
33. 'What Mellows Wrote in Mountjoy'.
34. Patterson, pp. 28-29 and p. 44.
35. The Programme of Saor Eire (1931), reprinted in Mitchell and O'Snodaigh, p. 185.
36. See The Republican Congress Manifesto (1931) reprinted in Mitchell and O'Snodaigh, pp. 208-210.

led to our boundless faith in the efficacy of guerrilla warfare as a means of freeing this country.'[37] The article continued:

> It is no uncommon thing to meet a patriotic Irishman, who, placing all of our past heroes who fought against England in the same category, jumps to the conclusion that as the cause for which they fought and the principles which they held were, broadly speaking, the same, therefore the methods of warfare which they used cannot be improved upon. The utter absurdity of this proposition will be evident to everyone who realises that all warfare and strategy must be placed on the living conditions of a people...[38]

The socialist-republican critique expanded into a fully-fledged advocacy to 'undo the British conquest' in all its forms which entailed the dismantlement of native Irish capitalism and the return of all 'wealth producing sources' to the people.[39] All the same, the proponents of this programme were anxious to retain the support of the conservative elements within the movement by stressing that the nationalist and socio-economic struggles were complementary, not exclusive, as George Gilmore sought to elucidate:

> In answer to certain people who are suggesting that we are 'sullying the flag' by introducing 'bread-and-butter politics' and that we should keep our movement on a higher and spiritual plane. I say that the spiritual life of a nation is not a thing apart from its material welfare but that it can be compared to a blossom growing from its own roots.[40]

By 1936 the republican movement's socialist initiatives had collapsed in a welter of internal bickering and public indifference.[41] Both Saor Eire and the Republican Congress were attempts to stem the flow of support towards Fianna Fail which was becoming increasingly unsympathetic towards the IRA. Following a resurgence in IRA activity in the South between March and April 1936, which resulted in the killings of a retired Royal Navy Vice-Admiral and a Garda (police) officer, the organisation was declared illegal and its leaders arrested. Disillusionment with de Valera's Fianna Fail, and with the failure of the movement's socialist excursions, hardened the

37. M. O'Donnell, 'Who Fights and Runs', *AP*, 25 March 1927.
38. *Ibid.*.
39. G. Gilmore, 'The Revolutionary Task', *AP*, 30 April 1932.
40. *Ibid.*.
41. See E. Rumpf and A. Hepburn, *Nationalism and Socialism in Twentieth Century Ireland* (Liverpool, 1977), pp. 91-93.

perception that the political road was a profitless one to travel. This feeling was strongly reflected among grass roots IRA members who were fed up with their leaders' contorted and ineffective political manoeuvrings. It was not altogether surprising that the leadership passed into the hands of Sean Russell, an ardent militarist, who advocated a bombing campaign against England. The election of Russell as Chief of Staff at the IRA Convention of April 1938, caused the defection of people like Sean MacBride and the other remaining politically dextrous minds still left in the movement. Even some of the more thoughtful military elements, like Tom Barry, who disagreed with the idea of a bombing campaign, left the movement for good.

Russell's plans came to fruition on 12 January 1939 when the IRA, claiming the authority of the 'Government of the Irish Republic', delivered an ultimatum to the British government which warned that unless its forces were withdrawn from Ireland in four days, the IRA would 'reserve the right of appropriate action without further notice'.[42] The ultimatum was ignored and on 16 January the bombings began. By the end of 1939 there had been 291 explosions which resulted in 7 deaths and 96 injuries.[43] The bombing campaign was a graphic illustration of the paucity of strategic planning induced by the loss of internal political guidance. Had there been such firm guidance then the campaign might have at least identified some specific military and political goals to be achieved by the bombings. As it was, there was no co-ordinated targeting policy nor any attempt to engage in a sustained propaganda dialogue with the British to continually remind them of IRA demands. There is little to suggest that the IRA had any clear idea of how its disparate bomb attacks would coalesce into an effective instrument of pressure with which to achieve republican objectives. Presumably the bombings were designed to cause sufficient panic and fear within British

42. IRA Ultimatum to British government, 12 Jan. 1939, reprinted in Mitchell and O'Snodaigh, pp. 220-221.
43. Ireland, (Tom), *Ireland Past and Present*, p. 690.

society to force the government to open negotiations on the ending of partition. Essentially, the IRA was following along the similar sort of lines as the unsuccessful Fenian dynamiters of the 1880s. Press reports at the time noted that the campaign did not produce panic but merely aroused anti-Irish feeling in Britain which helped usher in the Prevention of Violence Act of July 1939 which permitted the deportation of IRA suspects.[44] In the seven months after the Act's introduction there were 145 expulsions.[45] British pre-occupations with the far more threatening spectre of the German conquest of Europe in World War II further diminished the effect of the campaign, as was demonstrated by the muted response, both in Britain and abroad, to the executions of two IRA men who had been convicted of taking part in a bomb attack in Coventry which had killed five people.[46] Neither did the bombings generate much support in Ireland. De Valera was concerned to preserve Ireland's neutrality in World War II and did not want reports of the IRA's intrigues with the Germans to give the British a pretext to reoccupy the country.[47] In a speech in Co. Cavan, in February 1940, de Valera denounced the IRA campaign by warning: 'These people may get the country into a mess that the whole Irish people might not be able to get out of. We sympathise with their ambitions, but we cannot allow that to blind us to the consequences of their deeds.'[48] In January 1940, the Irish government passed the Emergency Powers Act and immediately began interning IRA members.[49] By mid-1940 the bombing campaign had petered out under pressure from special police and judicial measures in both Britain and Ireland.

The absence of any real planning or direction in the bombing campaign

44. *The New York Times*, 11 Feb. 1940.
45. *The Daily Herald*, 10 Feb. 1940.
46. See *The Manchester Guardian*, 9 Feb. 1940.
47. Fanning, pp. 169-170.
48. Quoted in *The Daily Express*, 19 Feb. 1940.
49. See *The Daily Telegraph*, 8 Jan. 1940.

was displayed when the IRA fell back on slogans as a strategic rationale. With the start of World War II Russell declared, in October 1939, that 'England's difficulty-Ireland's opportunity has ever been the watchword of the Gael... Now is the time for Irishmen to take up arms and strike a blow for the Ulster people.'[50] The notion of striking against Britain while she was distracted by foreign entanglements had been elevated by the 1916 rising as it was felt that Britain's commitments during the First World War had weakened its forces in Ireland and contributed to the rising's military effectiveness. As a consequence, this aphorism was repeatedly promulgated during the inter-war years as a standard for republican action: 'the simple fact that Ireland's right to freedom imposes a duty to attempt to seize freedom when the occasion offers... To let an opportunity to break the British connection go by default would be a crime... we are not free to dodge such action when opportunity presents.'[51] The military logic for such justifications was unconvincing in the 1939 campaign because the imposition of strict wartime security measures in Britain further hampered IRA operations.[52] On the political level, too, the hollowness of 'England's difficulty-Ireland's opportunity' was also demonstrated because Britain's immediate inclination towards Ireland in the early months of the Second World War, as de Valera feared, was to use Ulster to invade Eire, not to hand it over in exchange for a deal to end Irish neutrality.[53]

Beneath the superficial catchcrys, the entire 1939 bombing enterprise exposed the dominant influences which had come to exert themselves upon the republican movement's thinking. Recourse to violence was evaluated not as a method to achieve political objectives but almost as an impulse to satisfy

50. Quoted in T. Ryle Dwyer, *Irish Neutrality and the USA, 1939-1947* (Dublin, 1977), p. 21.
51. 'Moral Sanction for Revolution', *AP*, 29 Oct. 1926.
52. See Bowyer Bell, p. 170.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 151. See also R. Dudley Edwards, *An Atlas of Irish History* (London, 1981), pp. 80-83.

the ideological needs of the republican tradition. Despite the political dabblings of the 1930s, the pressure for military action had always been there, and had been building up ever since the end of the civil war. Indeed, in many respects, the republican tradition held little meaning without its militarily confrontational bearing. The movement affirmed in 1928: 'The position today is that a state of war exists between England and the Irish Republic... Until peace is made... Republicans will continue to work everywhere against England and English interests.'[54] These type of statements were buttressed by constant exhortations which emphasised 'the right of the armed manhood of Ireland to free the country'[55] and that: 'It is not the bargainers of relief but the soldiers of freedom that represent the wisdom of the Irish people'.[56]

The process by which the pressure for military action was allowed to be vented untutored by rigorous strategic analysis can be traced back to the concept of republican absolutism which insisted that the: 'Sovereignty and Unity of the Irish Nation are inalienable and non-judicable, and the Irish Republican Army cannot relinquish or surrender these fundamental national principles, which are a sacred trust.'[57] As we have noted earlier in this study, the IRA's unfaltering devotion to these principles ruled out compromise on any aspect of the republican agenda and precluded involvement in the parliamentary institutions of Ireland for fear of contaminating its ideological commitment to the republican struggle. The republican world of doctrinal absolutes proved an inhospitable environment for those of a pragmatic disposition. The essence of the republican experience from the 1920s to the late 1930s therefore reflected the gradual paring away of all the layers of political influence, as those pragmatic elements which sought to

54. 'IRA Attitude Towards Britain', *AP*, 31 March 1928.
55. M. Twomey, 'The Task of the IRA', *AP*, 3 Dec. 1932.
56. 'Oglaigh Na h-Eireann - Manifesto to the Irish People'.
57. Adjutant General, IRA, Official Statement to all Ranks, 31 Jan. 1933, reprinted in *AP*, 4 Feb. 1933.

challenge the movement's ideological parameters in search of more effective ways of facilitating republican goals eventually felt compelled to disassociate themselves from the movement. Beginning with the original division over the 1921 Treaty, the process was followed later by the break with Sinn Fein and the Fianna Fail split, with the final haemorrhage taking place after the IRA Convention of 1938. Each successive defection enhanced the deference to republican orthodoxy of those who remained and further compressed the movement's strategic thinking into a narrow framework from which it was progressively harder to deviate. The systematic diminution of political influence over the IRA allowed ideological pressures to override dispassionate calculations of the organisation's actual military potential. Arguably, the key event in this regard was the break with Sinn Fein in 1925 which cut off the IRA from its only link with a tangible political constituency. With all control over IRA policy centred within its own Army Council, the steady slide towards the 1939 campaign proceeded unchecked by any non-military source which, theoretically at least, might have been able to align the IRA's military capabilities with more limited, but attainable, political goals.

Besides the internal ideological dynamic which spurred the IRA to military action, the 1939 bombing campaign can also be seen as a symptom of the movement's desperation to break out of the political isolation imposed by the rising popularity of Fianna Fail. By gearing up to mount a military campaign, the IRA could hope to out-manoeuvre Fianna Fail on the question of Irish unification where the party's commitment seemed least convincing.[58] It is possible that for this reason the republican movement was at pains to deny that it was simply an armed clique hankering after a piece of the action. According to a statement issued by the Army Council in 1933:

58. S. Cronin, *Irish Nationalism* (Dublin, 1980), p. 160.

> The Irish Republican Army is not a militarist caste. It springs from the people and arises out of their natural desire for national freedom, and out of their intense need to be relieved from Imperial exploitation. The Army is the leadership and the vanguard of the historic struggle for national freedom and for economic liberation.[59]

Yet this statement went on to confuse the IRA's pretensions to represent the people with its adherence to its own private morality when it added 'that the Irish Republican Army exists to serve the interests of the Irish Nation and to free the people from political subjection and economic exploitation.'[60] The fact that the IRA's concept of the 'Irish Nation' patently did not enjoy demonstrable mass support merely emphasised how much of a loose cannon the organisation had become within Irish politics. As the Army Council statement implied, the IRA claimed the right to employ violence in any way it chose to achieve its objectives. Yet by defining its role so narrowly as a military organisation dedicated to the nationalist cause, the IRA undermined its ability to attract the necessary public support and resources to sustain a prolonged military campaign, so reducing its power to reach its objectives. In this sense, the 1939 bombing campaign can be seen not as a serious attempt to advance the nationalist cause, but as a sign of the movement reverting to type as a vehicle for preserving the doctrinal purity of the republican vision. Thus the bombing campaign underscored that a 'militarist caste' was exactly what the IRA had become.

Towards a Self-Perpetuating Military Tradition - The 1956-62 Border War

The quality of republican strategic thinking would never prove quite so barren as it was in the 1939 campaign. Even so, the IRA's next military venture in the 1950s verified that the sort of inwardly generated pressures which gave rise to the bombing campaign were not unique to the time but endemic to the process of republican strategic formulation. During the

59. 'The Army Council Manifesto', *AP*, 22 April 1933.
60. *Ibid*..

1940s and 1950s the same impetus to initiate hostilities against Britain was established. This time the accent was placed on tackling the problem of unification at source, Northern Ireland. Articles in the republican press listed the iniquities of partition and focused attention on the province as the kingpin of Britain's attempt to preserve 'her own selfish interests and prestige'[61] in Ireland. Republican rhetoric on this issue was also accompanied by more traditional rallying calls which proclaimed that the 'time has come in this country to again state the demand of the Irish Nation in clear unmistakable terms.'[62] The insinuations were obvious, that the scene was being set for another military confrontation.

Actual planning for the next campaign began in 1950 and the six years that were to elapse before hostilities opened in 1956 did ensure that as a technical undertaking it was a better organised affair. The aim was to infiltrate IRA units into the largely nationalist border regions of Northern Ireland from where attacks could be mounted in order to paralyse the civil administration in those areas. Promising auguries were also offered by the large measure of popular steam built-up behind the nationalist cause. Sinn Fein had been reactivated as the IRA's political arm in 1948 and during the mid-1950s it campaigned vigorously in Northern Ireland. In the Westminster elections of May 1955 the party received 152,310 votes which constituted virtually the entire nationalist electorate in the North, and in the process won two seats for abstentionist candidates. Sinn Fein hailed the vote as a landmark in its 'campaign to organise all Irishmen into one united people to end forever British occupation and influence in Ireland.'[63] For these reasons the movement was able to strike an up-beat note in its first pronouncement after the campaign had begun on 11 December 1956. 'This fight', the movement confidently predicted, 'will be won when the united strength of

61. P. MacLogain, 'Partition - Its Cause and Consequences', *UI*, May 1948.
62. S. O'Kelly, 'The United Irishmen Were Republicans', *UI*, July/Aug. 1948.
63. 'Sinn Fein Victory', *UI*, June 1955.

our people is thrown in the scales against British imperialism... The enemy's bridgehead is weakening. We hope that in the months to come it will crumble completely.'[64]

From these reasonably auspicious beginnings the IRA's border war slowly, but progressively over a period of five years, ran into the ground. The tendency to elitism in republican ideology rose to the fore in the campaign as the major factor that dulled the movement's political senses and which helped contrive to fritter away the nationalist sympathy established in the two years preceding the outbreak of the conflict. The first symptom of this elitism was that it was never made plain at the start of the war exactly what the violence was meant to achieve politically. Only a very generalised explanation was provided some three months into the campaign in an interview with an IRA officer who stated that the purpose of the attacks were threefold: '(1) To spotlight... [that a] part... [of] Ireland is still occupied by British troops, (2) that [the] occupation is bitterly resented by 80% of the whole Irish people and by almost 40% of the people in the six occupied counties', and finally, '(3) We aim to rally our people in their resistance to the occupation forces and to make the occupation difficult, costly and impossible.'[65] It was a characteristic exposition of the republican attitude towards the role of force in politics. Violence was seen as an agitationary instrument that would solidify public support into a cohesive expression of mass opposition to British involvement in Ireland. This, in turn, would be reflected through increased republican military activity, with either the tacit or open backing of the Southern government and so further embroil the British in a general conflagration in the North. As in the Anglo-Irish war, the combination of financial and domestic political pressure would, it was believed, eventually force Britain out.

64. 'Revolt in the North', *UI*, Jan. 1957.
65. 'Freedom Fighter', *UI*, Feb. 1957.

The movement's self-image as the trail-blazer of Irish nationalism governed the way it viewed the large Sinn Fein vote of 1955. Rather than regarding it as a manifestation of broad Catholic discontent in Northern Ireland, a popular base to be developed and fashioned towards specific republican objectives, it was seen, instead, as a straight licence for military action. Once the campaign was underway, no effort was made to retain and nurture nationalist confidence through, say, an effective propaganda offensive to fully explain the motives of the IRA's strategy, or the formulation of economic and social programmes to appeal to the population at large. Admittedly, the banning of Sinn Fein in the North in the first days of the conflict would have undoubtedly hindered any such attempts, but the movement's basic reluctance to build up a more solid political profile was apparent in the public pronouncements of its members, as evinced in the following comments made by Sinn Fein President, Padraig MacLogain, in his address to the party's annual Ard-Fheis (conference) in 1957:

> Quite frequently Sinn Fein is bitterly attacked because of an alleged failure to put its policy and programme before the people and abide their decision. Such attacks are but a further example of the quibbling indulged in by the opponents of our movement. In point of fact Sinn Fein as a national organisation puts its policy before the people on both sides of the Border and gives them the opportunity of signifying their attitude towards the restoration of the unity and independence of Ireland.[66]

The tone of these remarks implied that not only did the movement take the large vote for Sinn Fein as approval for a military campaign, but also as an endorsement of the general *leitmotiv* of the republican tradition which itself legitimised violence without popular consent. This assessment can be cross-referenced with other republican statements during the campaign which explicitly linked the two subjects. For example, the IRA's Easter message of 1957 declared:

> We base our claim for the support of the Irish people throughout the world on the proclamation of 1916. This is our declaration of Inde-

66. P. MacLogain, 'Presidential Address', *UI*, Dec. 1958.

> pendence and charter of liberty... Nothing less can claim our allegiance and we will accept nothing less... We are uplifted and encouraged in our fight when we see the return to the old allegiance and how brightly the torch of freedom glows. The magnificent success of the Sinn Fein candidates in the recent election gives us new strength, after being abandoned so long.[67]

Of course, it is not surprising that a movement with a long heritage of revolt should seek to vindicate its actions in the present by relating them to the events of the past. What is interesting in the above statement, though, was how the 'allegiance' to the 'proclamation of 1916', which can be seen as the embodiment of the whole republican tradition, was taken as the ultimate source of authority for the movement's conduct. It was as if the backing shown for Sinn Fein in 1955 was perceived not as a direct mandate for armed struggle so much as a recognition of the validity - a 'return to the old allegiance' - of the republican approach. Again, this can be seen as the product of nationalist-elitism as it clearly established loyalty to the republican tradition above popular consent for IRA actions. What this suggests is that, as in the 1939 bombing campaign, republican strategic thinking was being driven by ideological symbolism without any real idea as to what could actually be achieved through a military campaign. Perhaps the closest the movement came to acknowledging that the military instrument was being governed by internal impulsion free from any consideration for the limits of public tolerance for its violence, came in 1958 when the journal, the *United Irishman*, testified that: 'The policy of the Resistance movement is made by the Movement itself. It is dictated by principle and one aim: *the freedom of our country.* It takes help from no-one but the Irish people *in carrying out this mandate of history.*'[68]

The practical effect of the IRA's behaviour was to make its violence appear politically worthless. The movement again had to deflect criticism that it was simply glorifying a tradition of violence. 'Members of the

67. 'Easter Message', *UI*, May 1957.
68. 'Resistance to British Rule in Ireland Today', *UI*, May 1958.

Movement', Padraig MacLogain averred, 'do not face death or imprisonment and hardships just to maintain a tradition of militarism or self-sacrifice. The struggle today is striving to accomplish the task of achieving full freedom'.[69] However, the point was that although the IRA's *own* strategic calculations concerning the utility of armed force appeared a perfectly suitable means to achieve its political objectives within its own narrow, elitist understanding of the function of violence, to many others outside the movement its strategy was incomprehensible. As the campaign progressed, the IRA increasingly tended to wallow in the mythical language of republican imagery. For example, in mid-1958 the movement pronounced that those fighting for the IRA 'are in direct succession to the freedom fighters of all other generations of Irishmen who followed the same proud road', and who would undoubtedly enjoy entry into 'the great brotherhood of heroes and martyrs that mark 700 years of struggle to drive British forces out of Ireland.'[70] Such lofty rhetoric merely added weight to the perception that the entire campaign had become an irrelevant self-indulgence. As a consequence, many Northern Catholics came to resent the impositions and hardships created by the IRA's border war and punished the movement at the ballot box in the general election of October 1959 when Sinn Fein received only 73,415 votes, a collapse of over half on its 1955 performance.

The IRA's prospects for success in the border war had really melted away within the first year of the campaign. One of the most crucial blows came in July 1957 when the government in the Irish Republic introduced internment. By the end of 1958 nearly all the Army Council, GHQ staff and Sinn Fein executive were in gaol. The loss of the limited sanctury offered by the South badly affected IRA operations. By 1960 the level of IRA attacks had fallen to just 26, down from a peak of 341 in 1957.[71] Despite

69. MacLogain, 'Presidential Address'.
70. 'Resistance to British Rule in Ireland Today'.
71. Bowyer Bell, pp. 328-329.

the declining effectiveness of the campaign, throughout 1958 and 1959 the movement was still optimistically assuring that 'Resistance is growing stronger'[72] and pledging itself 'to intensify the Campaign, to press home the fight, and never to desist in its efforts until British Occupation Forces are withdrawn from Ireland'.[73] There was no truth in these avowals, they simply underlined that the IRA had become an inflexible, militarily autonomous organisation, its violence being wholly unregulated by any meaningful sort of political authority. This point can be illustrated with reference to the theory elaborated by Clausewitz which asserts that the character of war is made up of the inter-relationship of three elements; the 'primordial' violence generated by all the passions and emotions that lead to conflict; the play of chance and probability inherent in the manipulation of the military instrument; and political reason, which ensures that war is controlled to serve the ends of policy.[74] Such a theory is premised largely on, say, a sovereign state system, where there is usually a distinct cleavage between all three elements: that is, where the executive authority responsible for policy making will oversee the military planners who themselves will be responsible for welding the raw violence of popular passions into an effective instrument of policy. But, within a sub-state entity like the republican movement little or no such distinctions exist as all three elements are often likely to be embodied in a single organisation. Where sources of political influence over such organisations (i.e. external political parties or internal factions, organisational bodies etc.) have been eroded, then it is possible that violent ideological passions may come to dominate over all aspects of military policy. This sort of process appeared to be at work within the republican movement. The inherent dynamic within republican ideology, with its fervent commitment to the nationalist vision wedded to an

72. 'Britain Must Withdraw Her Forces', *UI*, Jan. 1958.
73. 'Resistance Statement', *UI*, Jan. 1959.
74. Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 89.

an ardent belief in the efficacy of violence, seemed to be dictating the course of the IRA's military activity apparently unhindered by any need to reach a favourable political conclusion. The tone established within the movement's rhetoric by the latter half of the border war bears out this assessment. Even before the verdict of the 1959 elections was delivered upon the IRA's campaign, the movement was making no pretence to justify the continuation of the war with reference to anything else except to the elitist themes of its ideology. According to one republican commentary of mid-1959:

> When Pearse went forth to wage his struggle, the authority he heeded was not that of the effete Parliamentary party - which might well term itself then the representative of the people. No! The authority Pearse heeded was the authority of history, the authority of armed resistance to foreign rule, the authority of the Republican tradition... There can no longer be a debate about how best to liberate the six counties of our country held by foreign rule. The constitutional way has been rejected. The way of struggle has been accepted. The path of resistance has been trod and must continue to be trod until either our people's will for freedom prevails or our enemy destroys that will. There is no other way.[75]

Needless to say, virtually all organisations, especially political groupings, are bound together by a doctrine or series of principles which give them their meaning and purpose and, doubtless, the adherence to a particular set of beliefs will to some degree affect the external behaviour of all organisations in the pursuit of their objectives. What appears so unusual in the IRA's case is the extent to which violence itself had become an integral component of republican doctrine, seemingly employed less as a rational instrument of policy but more to maintain the ideological identity of the movement. This goes to the heart of the matter concerning the lack of political regulation of the military instrument, as the conviction that 'There is no other way' explicitly rejected the thought of any internal political dialogue capable of continuously evaluating the effectiveness of the military option. In this respect, the movement was not strategically

75. S. Cronin, 'The Authority of History is Behind Fight in the North', *UI*, June 1959.

engaged at all. There was no ends-means analysis. The movement had simply become a self-perpetuating military tradition.

Again, it should be stressed that the difficulties imposed on republican strategic formulation by the lack of political control were systemic. The elitist attachment to violence, combined with doctrinal inflexibility, excluded all potential for either the consideration of alternative non-military options or the modification of political goals to accommodate actual military capabilities. As such, republican strategic thought was confined largely to a few simplistic precepts. The ideology defined the political object, a united independent republic; it defined the enemy, Britain; and it defined the means to challenge the enemy in order to attain the object, military action. Yet, from any detached analytical perspective, and as five and a half years of wasted effort testified, it also defined the most likely outcome, isolation and defeat.

The IRA Reflects - The Strategic Reappraisal of the 1960s

The IRA called off its campaign in February 1962. The ideologically elitist prism through which the IRA viewed the world was displayed in its final campaign communique of 26 February. It blamed the movement's defeat on the 'attitude of the general public whose minds have been deliberately distracted from the supreme issue facing the Irish people - the unity and freedom of Ireland.' And in renewing its pledge of 'eternal hostility to the British Forces of Occupation', it called on the Irish people to show greater support in its preparations for the 'final and victorious phase of the struggle for the full freedom of Ireland.'[76] Beneath the pugnacious language, far from drawing up the battlelines for the next confrontation, the collapse of the border war had caused the IRA to slip into a mood of despondency. The

76. Irish Republican Publicity Bureau (IRPB) Statement, 26 Feb., 1926, reprinted in *UI* March 1962.

task of reviving the movement fell to Cathal Goulding who was made Chief of Staff in 1962. Goulding was a veteran IRA activist but was unassociated with the failure of the border campaign as he spent the early years of the conflict in prison for his part in an arms raid in England in 1953. Under his direction, the IRA instituted an extensive reappraisal of the republican tradition to discover why the movement had been, in Goulding's words, 'unable to succeed in spite of the fact that the people engaged in its revolutionary activities were willing to make any sacrifice for it.'[77] The basic conclusion reached by the internal debate, said Goulding, was that the 'people had no real knowledge of our objectives'; largely because the movement did not really have any: 'The fight for freedom had become an end in itself to us. Instead of a means, it became an end. We hadn't planned to achieve the freedom of Ireland. We simply planned *to fight* for the freedom of Ireland. We could never hope to succeed because we never planned to succeed.'[78] Goulding was admitting, in a very candid fashion, that for most of the twentieth century the republican movement had been strategically redundant.

The analysis of the failure of republican strategy developed from the thesis that the nature of British imperialism in Ireland had been refined in the face of nationalist resistance in the Anglo-Irish war. British control, it was believed, no longer rested on the primitive imposition of foreign institutions backed up by military might, but on a more subtle system of 'neo-colonialism', a concept defined by Roy Johnston, the IRA's leading political theorist, as 'a means of retaining the substance of imperial rule while giving the shadow of independence'.[79] So, in this way, the Treaty of 1921 ceded most of the paraphernalia of political autonomy but did not grant real independence that would have allowed full control over Irish resources which, instead, remained in the hands of British financial concerns. 'Failure to

77. Interview with C. Goulding, *This Week*, 31 July 1970.
78. *Ibid.*.
79. R. Johnston, '1916 and its Aftermath', *UI*, April 1966.

understand this', Johnston argued, 'led the Republicans to concentrate on the outward trappings of alien rule in the North, ignoring the economic domination of the whole country.'[80] Therefore, the first extrapolation derived from the analysis, as Goulding explained, was that if the republican leadership wanted to maintain a revolutionary organisation then 'we would need to have a policy for the next phase of the fight against British Imperialism in Ireland.'[81]

The spirit of republican thinking of the time was summed up by Deasun Breatnach who contended that 'freedom is not something to be flaunted at the national level, in the council of the nations; it must go down to all the people.'[82] The challenge for the movement in this respect was to devise a policy that could win popular support by promising social and political emancipation to the ordinary citizens of Ireland. 'This is what we were fighting for,' Goulding argued, 'and we had to make it plain to the people. To do this we had to involve ourselves in their everyday struggles for existence.'[83] In 1964 the IRA gave approval to the movement's involvement in a programme of political agitation and endorsed a plan to build up a leftist coalition - a 'national liberation front' - which would campaign on a broad social and economic agenda, though one recommendation to abolish the policy of abstention was rejected.[84] By the mid-1960s ideas were being circulated concerning possible republican involvement in areas such as campaigns to combat unemployment and emigration through active participation in farming and industrial co-operatives, trade unions and so on.[85] At the rhetorical level, too, the movement's language was increasingly using the discourse of

80. R. Johnston, 'Whither Ireland?', *UI*, Oct. 1965.
81. Interview with Goulding, *This Week*.
82. D. Breatnach, 'Realism', *UI*, Sept. 1963.
83. C. Goulding, Statement (1972), in R. Sweetman, *On Our Knees: Ireland 1972* (London, 1972), p. 141.
84. *Ibid.*, p. 142.
85. See, for example, R. MacBoin, 'An Economic Resistance Movement', *UI*, Oct. 1964.

class confrontation by talking about the unity of the 'urban and rural dweller' versus 'the class of exploitation, the class of gombeenism [term meaning usury: pejorative description of Irish business interests] the class of slavery.'[86]

Although the leadership's diagnosis was couched in the terms of social revolution, the notion that the whole rethink represented an enormous Marxist digression - a fundamental transformation in republican thinking - can be over-stated. In fact the changes advocated by those like Goulding were contiguous with the tradition of socialist-republicanism which went back to Lalor and Connolly, and the inspiration from whom the modern leadership frequently cited.[87] More particularly, the revisionists' arguments paralleled those made in the 1920s and 1930s by people like Peadar O'Donnell and George Gilmore. For example, it was Gilmore who wrote in 1932 that only when:

> ...the system of exploitation has been destroyed and a system based upon the recognition of the fact that the lands and other wealth-producing resources of Ireland are the property of the people of Ireland and not of the exploiting class - until that has been accomplished we will not be in a position to say the [British] Conquest has been undone.[88]

The language used in the 1930s may have been similar to that of the 1960s, but more importantly, so was the analysis which underpinned it. Gilmore believed that although republicans were motivated by the highest ideals of service to the nationalist cause, in practice, he said, 'the IRA often bewilders the Ireland it would serve and so loses the mass backing which alone could make it effective.' He continued:

> The Republican Movement is rich in principle but disastrously short in policy. It is poor leadership that rests itself entirely on principles and neglects sorting out, in all their concreteness, the conditions within which its struggle must develop, for it is only on this sorting out that policy can be properly based.[89]

86. C. Goulding, 'We Can Go It Alone', *UI*, Nov. 1966.
87. See *ibid.*.
88. Gilmore, 'The Revolutionary Task'.
89. Quoted in McInerney, p. 148.

These were exactly the type of criticisms Goulding and his kind were making of the contemporary IRA. But it should be noted that although the social-republcian critique, both in the 1930s and the 1960s, led the movement in a politically left-ward direction, it did not countenance that republicans should be tied to any formal political doctrine. Rather, it advocated that the movement should get away from the belief that it could operate in a vacuum where idealised images of the republic would have a timeless attraction and should become more attuned to the ever changing political climate. In a phrase, the struggle needed to be seen to be relevant to modern Ireland. Undoubtedly, the IRA in the 1960s was influenced by aspects of Marxist thinking, and also, in part, by the radicalism of the age with its anti-authority ethos and emphasis on agitationary politics. Gerry Adams has written tangentially of the influence of sixties radicalism as an era animated not by rigid ideologies but by 'the whole undefined movement of ideas and changes of style', which 'produced a sense of impatience with the *status quo*, allied to a young, enthusiastic and euphoric confidence.'[90] The most radical move undertaken by the IRA's leadership at this time was to consult political thinkers from outside the movement, people like Roy Johnston, who later joined the IRA, and Anthony Coughlan, both of whom had contacts with communist groups and radical factions. However, as Henry Patterson, who has charted the history of republican-socialism, has pointed out, Goulding's motive for bringing in outsiders was essentially to reimport the tradition of radical thinking which, out of some three decades of neglect, had been all but eradicated from the movement as a whole.[91] Avid admirer of the radical left though Goulding was, nevertheless, he was not a slave to a Marxist ideological obsession.

Though the radicalisation of the IRA was influenced by various external

90. Adams, *The Politics of Irish Freedom*, p. 10.
91. Patterson, p. 87.

factors, overall, the process can be seen as largely internal to the republican tradition. Indeed, the nationalist question remained to the fore of the movement's thinking. In enunciating his theories of neo-colonialism and the crisis in the Irish economic system, Johnston expressly stated that all these problems 'are in fact connected: they add up to the Irish National Question of the Sixties.' Johnston went on: 'For it will be found that the major obstacles to the satisfaction of the people's needs is the reality of alien rule over the whole of Ireland.'[92] The remedy, of course, was the creation of a fully united and independent state which would have total control over Ireland's economic surplus.[93] The change from the IRA's previous position was simply that the movement felt that it could derive a greater level of support across the whole of Ireland by basing its appeal on a platform which went wider than the single concentration on the political unification of the country. However, the leadership felt that its programme could also transcend sectarian divisions in the North by winning over both Protestant and Catholic workers to the side of revolutionary socialism.

Overall, the neo-colonial argument provided the IRA with a comforting view of its situation. In the first instance, it explained why the IRA had become isolated and had gone down to continuous military defeat since the civil war, as the failure to participate in the labour struggle had caused the movement to detach itself from the everyday needs of the people. Secondly, the theory painted an optimistic picture of a huge potential republican constituency; an image of the Irish masses who sub-consciously yearned to be unburdened from the manacles of imperialism and whose revolutionary awareness could be stimulated provided they were given the necessary organisational leadership. In other words, the neo-colonial analysis reassured republicans of their continuing relevance while skirting around less savoury

92. Johnston, 'Whither Ireland?'.
93. *Ibid.*.

explanations for their predicament, such as the possibility that they, and the cause they represented, had simply come to be regarded as an anachronism in the modern era. And finally, it provided a useful hook upon which to hang the nationalist cause. Altogether, a highly convenient explanation.

Nonetheless, the leadership's rethink did challenge aspects of conventional republican wisdom, especially by opening up the question of peaceful political participation which confronted the traditional refusal to engage in 'partitionist' politics. Therefore, to put the reassessment of the 1960s into perspective, what we can say, is that the revisionist process stemmed from a psychological change, as opposed to structural changes in terms of, say, the age or education of the IRA's membership. The IRA's low ebb after the demoralisation of the border war was such that socialist republicans were able to hold sway within the leadership and assert their agenda more forcefully than they had been able to do before. An agitationary socialist manifesto was embraced, not out of the whole-hearted conviction of the movement, but out of a prevailing sense of apathy as it looked like the only way the IRA could preserve its *raison d'etre*.

All this is not to suggest that there was no hostility to the leadership's new programme. Initially, opposition was muted, but it grew as the implications of the strategic review, particularly how they would affect the military instrument, were thought through. Concern at the leadership's policies was aired in the pages of *An Phoblacht*. The journal had been revived under the aegis of a group established in 1965 calling itself the Committee for Revolutionary Action (CRA) with the specific intention of 'combating deviationism and revisionism within the ranks of organised republicanism.'[94] The immediate cause for discontent was the suspicion that the movement was being controlled by a left-wing cabal based in Dublin which was attempting to shut-out all other ranks from the decision making process.

94. *AP* (CRA), Jan. 1967.

An Phoblacht argued that the debate over the movement's future should be conducted openly amongst the membership as a whole. Instead, *An Phoblacht* complained, the 'business of the Irish Revolution *is but* the exclusive domain of the few who are organisationally engaged in the functioning of Irish Republicanism.'[95] The CRA's real *bete noire* was the 'foreign directed clique' made up of those like Johnston and Coughlan who, it was felt, were out to manipulate the movement 'along the lines advantageous to the interests of a foreign power', namely, 'the British Communist Party, and its Irish sections, which are in turn directed from Moscow.'[96] The idea of a communist ploy to subvert the movement was more imagined than real, but such allegations were symptomatic of the resentment felt by the more traditionalist faction against the influence of those deemed to be outsiders who had been brought in to advise the leadership. Sean MacStiofain, one of the few dissenters remaining on the Army Council, believed that the course of the leadership's leftward drift into radical politics was depriving the movement of a proper sense of direction. Rather than focusing the movement's attention on the need to confront the crucial issue of British rule in Ireland, the Army Council was getting bogged down in what he saw as meaningless nit-picking over policy resolutions and discussion documents that had no practical value. Meanwhile, the movement's military assets were being wasted. MacStiofain believed that if the situation went on 'the IRA would end up as a paper army'.[97] The deep seated fear was that neglection of the military side in favour of developing an agitationary organisation would eat away the movement's moral fibre causing it to lose its strength, cohesion and, ultimately, its very identity. *An Phoblacht* was apoplectic at the very thought:

> But in addition to it being incapable of effecting what our people want, parliamentary agitation is in a thousand ways demoralising. Even if it could win our independence, independence so won, would do no good; for

95. *Ibid.*.
96. *AP* (CRA), May/June 1967.
97. MacStiofain, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*, p. 104.

> freedom to do good, must be gained with difficulty and heroic sacrifice, in the face of perils and death... Platform movements are necessarily unmilitary, and, consequently, bad for a nation that wants to free herself from a foreign yoke... In short, *no more insane and wicked idea could enter the brain of fools and knaves, than the notion of reviving the system of agitation.*[98]

The continued presence of such hardline traditionalist views, which looked on the use of violence as virtuous for its own sake, was something about which Goulding was well aware. He understood that unless a specific role for the armed struggle was guaranteed, the potential existed for the hardliners to become a law unto themselves in the worst traditions of Irish republican militarism. As Goulding reflected: 'we had on our hands trained physical force revolutionaries who were, to some extent, still armed. They would decide for themselves what would happen next, if we didn't decide for them... It was essential to stop any premature action by these people'.[99] The priority for Goulding was to hold the movement together during a period of transition which meant averting any outright hardline-revisionist cleavage. This returned the leadership to the fundamental problem concerning the imposition of greater control over the military instrument; how to carve out a definitive role for the physical forcers while trying to subordinate the IRA to more general policy objectives, without, at the same time, either raising the ire of hardliners or encouraging those tendencies to military autonomy?

The dual process of mollifying traditionlist elements while attempting to shift the focus of republican military thinking took place at three levels. The first was at the rhetorical level to reassure hardliners of the continuing need for a military dimension to republican strategy by quashing rumours that the revisionist programme would entail the abandonment of the armed struggle: 'There is no thought of relinquishing the use of force. No-one who has thought at all about the nature of the division of this country

98. *AP* (CRA), Jan. 1967.
99. Interview with Goulding, *This Week*.

is willing to rule out the necessity for using the gun to bring about the realisation of the aspirations of the Irish people.'[100] Yet these assurances were also carefully qualified by placing the military instrument within a broader context as just one facet amongst a range of options that the movement could pursue, as Goulding signified when he declared: 'We have only to look around us to see that we will have to fight on the military front, the social front, the economic front and the cultural front.'[101] These sorts of pronouncements conveyed the feeling that the armed struggle would be retained as a matter of absolute necessity, while in fact, it was being de-prioritised within the overall course of republican strategic formulation. This impression was maintained at the second level - the military planning level. To convince the traditionalists that the commitment to armed force was not just idle rhetoric, the leadership authorised a degree of military planning. According to interviews carried out by the analyst Henry Patterson with Cathal Goulding and Sean Garland, another prominent IRA revisionist, the movement had, since the mid-1960s, been drawing up plans for another guerrilla campaign in Northern Ireland.[102] Such planning was also supplemented from time to time by the odd operation like, for example, the attack on a British naval vessel in 1965 and the burning of a number of company buses in the furtherance of an industrial dispute in May 1968. In fact, neither the occasional attacks nor the formal military planning itself heralded any full-scale campaign. Goulding and his followers had no real intention of launching a new military offensive. Goulding acknowledged 'that our whole future as a political and revolutionary force should be geared to keeping our people out of gaol, and leading a revolution.'[103] It was this primary consideration which formed the basis of the third level -

100.T. Meade, 'No Longer Well-Meaning Political Simplicists', *UI*, Nov. 1966.
101.C. Goulding, 'There Will Be a Fight', *UI*, Sept. 1965.
102.Patterson, p. 96.
103.Interview with Goulding, *This Week*.

the actual conditions upon which the leadership believed military action could be sustained. In a seminal article setting out the movement's attitude towards the armed struggle, Tony Meade identified 'a new element in the willingness to use force, namely that this force will be defensive.'[104] The leadership visualised a time when violence would have to be used against the forces of reaction, they being the Stormont and Leinster House governments in the North and South respectively, which would inevitably attempt to crush the republican revolution once it looked like gaining popular momentum. 'When that day comes', Meade argued, 'it is hoped that the defensive measures adopted by the Movement will ensure that victory will be ours.'[105] The declaration was vague but significant as it reversed the traditional premise of republican strategy. No longer would the movement be a military spearhead. It would remain an elitist outfit but only in the Leninist sense as political organisers and agitators. In Garland's words: 'The Republican Army, north and south, must become the Army of the People, in fact as well as in name. It must be the vanguard of all militant and radical revolutionary groups in this country and as the vanguard be ready to move in defence of those struggling for their rights.'[106] The emphasis was now on using republican resources and energies to build up mass support. Tony Meade asserted that: 'Only in this way will we arrive at the day when the use of force will succeed.'[107] So the probability of a final military showdown with the forces of counter-revolution was something for which the movement had to be prepared. As Goulding proclaimed: 'I am not naive enough to think that we don't have to use guns. An armed proletariat is the only assurance that they can have the rule of the proletariat.'[108] It should be stressed that such a scenario was envisioned only *after* the IRA

104.Meade, 'No Longer Well-Meaning Political Simplicists'.
105.*Ibid.*.
106.S. Garland, Bodenstown Speech, *UI*, July 1968.
107.Meade, 'No Longer Well-Meaning Political Simplicists'.
108.Goulding Statement in Sweetman, p. 144.

had obtained widespread popular support. In the meantime, that support would have to be won through hard political campaigning. As if to underline the changes in outlook that this would necessitate, Meade sought to remind his colleagues that: 'Before that day comes we must be prepared to work in a way in which many of us are unaccustomed.'[109]

Meade's implicit appeal to IRA members to move away from the militarist ways of the past hinted at the scope of the changes being contemplated by the leadership. Adopting a social revolutionary posture towards the whole concept of Irish nationalism altered the entire substratum of republican strategic analysis. For a movement that had been bred on the belief of violence as a first resort, the new accent upon reviewing the value of armed force both as just one component of the republican struggle and with specific reference to the suitability of such means to the political circumstances prevailing at any particular time, represented a radical transformation in the movement's approach to military matters. One of the most important features of the reassessment was the plan to assert political control over the military instrument by gradually removing the General Army Convention, the supreme authority of the IRA, from the policy making process. For a number of years Goulding was circumscribed about what he could say in public on this issue for fear of alienating the hardliners, but a confidential document seized by Irish police in May 1966 clearly established where the intentions of the leadership lay. The document revealed that in the long term, decision making power would be transferred to the Sinn Fein national conference while the IRA Convention would contract to a 'specialist conference of certain people in the Movement for examining technical problems connected to the military aspect of the revolution.'[110]

109.Meade, 'No Longer Well-Meaning Political Simplicists'.
110.This document is reprinted in Lord Scarman, 'Violence and Civil Disturbance in Northern Ireland in 1969', *Report of Tribunal of Inquiry* (Belfast, 1972), cmnd. 556, vol. 2, p. 47, quoted in Patterson, p. 95.

What these restructuring proposals demonstrated was that, in the end, the revisionist and hardline perspectives were irreconcilable. Notwithstanding Goulding's efforts to bring as many hardliners as he could along the socialist-republican road, the plans to reduce the IRA's influence, the stress on gaining public confidence as the first priority of republican policy, the rejection of military vanguardism and the willingness to be open-minded about the mix of methods to achieve the movement's objectives, all repelled traditionalist assumptions concerning the pre-eminence of military means. Primarily, the leadership was interested in obtaining real political power. This meant disposing of the encumbrance of the apostolic succession. The revisionists did not want a movement that was merely capable of sustaining itself through myths and martyrs. Sean Garland, in his Bodenstown oration in June 1968, was adamant on this point. He argued that the republican movement was not sacrosanct but simply a vehicle to achieve tangible political goals:

> Let no mealy-mouthed sentimentalist tell us that we must preserve the movement as traditionally constituted if this proves impractical and hand on these impracticalities to the next generation. The struggle for the emancipation of the Irish people is inevitable and by saddling the next generation with useless tools and tactics we are not helping them but destroying their chances of success by binding them to a line of thought and action that was a failure with one generation and must just as surely be a failure with the next.'[111]

Such forthright language displayed the strength of feeling amongst the leadership. Although the sixties rethink by no means surveyed all of the options and the strategies open to the movement at the time, there is little reason to suspect that the republican leaders simply and cynically latched onto the nearest passing political fad to save the movement from what might otherwise have been its inevitable demise. Their conversion to the socialist path was genuine and they reflected carefully on how this would shape the movement's future organisation and strategic doctrine. The

111.Garland, Bodenstown Speech.

commitment to the socialist approach was underlined by Tomas MacGiolla, the President of Sinn Fein, who in 1969 declared: 'We do not regard socialism as a fashionable cloak to be worn or discarded as popular tastes dictate. I think we can say that no-one is today in any doubt where a Republican stands ideologically.'[112] Of course, whether social revolutionary maxims had any real relevance in a deeply religious and politically conservative country like Ireland is debatable. What we can say, though, is that the outcome of the IRA's self-examination did help to contain the military instrument within what strategic analysts would recognise as a more satisfactory theoretical framework. Yet the main problem is precisely that we only have *theory* to pronounce upon, chiefly because although the way the leadership *thought* about the relationship between ends and means certainly underwent a transformation, in practice, very little was done in this period to implement the recommended changes. For most of the decade the movement hardly participated in any sustained agitationary activity. In fact, it barely had any political profile whatsoever. Sean MacStiofain's allegation that the IRA was being allowed to atrophy while the leadership debated abstract policy positions was substantially correct. Moreover, Goulding admitted it: 'By 1967 the Movement had become dormant. It wasn't active in any political sense or even in any revolutionary sense. Membership was falling off. People had gone away. Units of the IRA and the Cumainn [local branches] of Sinn Fein had become almost non-existent.'[113] When an IRA conference was called in August 1967 to evaluate the movement's overall strength, the republican leaders 'suddenly realised that they had no Movement at all.'[114] The conference recommended that the IRA should 'openly declare for a socialist republic.'[115] This was the first time that the movement had decided to

112.T. MacGiolla, Bodenstown Speech, *UI*, July 1969.
113.Interview with Goulding, *This Week*.
114.*Ibid*..
115.*Ibid*..

act on the proposals endorsed by the IRA's rethink begun in 1964. The leadership was to pay for this laxity as events in Northern Ireland in the late 1960s reopened the whole debate on the future role of the armed struggle in republican strategy.

Tension and Division over Republican Strategy in the North - The Road to Rupture

During the early years of the IRA's introspection the rise of the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland largely passed it by. The original civil rights organisation, the Campaign for Social Justice, was founded by a Dungannon couple, Conn and Patricia McCluskey, in 1964 to campaign against anti-Catholic discrimination in the province. By the late 1960s the IRA's interest in civil rights had been firmly engaged, but republicans remained a minority group within the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) which had superceded the Campaign for Social Justice in 1967. NICRA was composed mainly of trade-unionists, left-wing activists and students. The republican leadership believed that NICRA could be used as a vehicle to 'help get the Protestants involved, and get away from the old divisions.'[116] Republican thinking held that in order for the unionist political establishment to maintain power, behind which lay its British imperial sponsor, it was necessary 'to divide the Protestant people from their Catholic fellow-countrymen and "protect" them behind a sectarian border.'[117] It was reasoned that the introduction of civil rights reforms and the establishment of political equality in the North would break down sectarian barriers, thereby undermining the basis of unionist government. Released from their sectarian blinkers, Protestant workers would combine with their Catholic brethren to collectively resist British colonial rule. The 'North is imperialism's strongest bastion in Ireland,' claimed the *United Irishman*, 'Weaken imper-

116.Goulding Statement in Sweetman, p. 143.
117.'Unionism and Paisley - An Analysis', *UI*, Nov. 1966.

ialism there and the winning of civil liberties would be such a weakening - and its hold on Ireland is weakened all over."[118]

Because the aim was to build a cross-community movement capable of uniting Catholics and Protestants, the principle of non-sectarianism was considered paramount. As a consequence, republican leaders were keen to play the civil rights issue with caution. They were particularly anxious to avoid the impression that NICRA was a stalking horse for the IRA to revitalise the nationalist cause. Any such impression, it was felt, would antagonise and repel Protestants. The emphasis was to be on peaceful political participation to win the confidence of Protestants by proving that republicans 'were the best champions of the needs of the ordinary people."[119] For this reason, when the large scale civil rights marches got under way individual republicans were allowed to act as stewards but not to adopt any corporate IRA profile. The role of the stewards was to try to steer the marchers away from any trouble with the police. However, the IRA's leadership was increasingly concerned at the participation of a number of extreme left-wing activists, with no connections to the republican movement, who were placing themselves at the head of the marches in order to manufacture violent confrontations with the police in the belief that this would expose the elemental brutality of unionist power. According to one of these activists, Eamonn McCann, the intention was 'to provoke the police into over reaction and thus spark off mass reaction against the authorities'.[120] After the first march from Coalisland to Dungannon in August 1968, the movement voiced criticism that 'some marchers should have tried to break through the cordons of police', arguing that 'this was just what [William] Craig [Stormont Home Affairs Minister], and the police would have liked, for then they

118.'Civil Rights Now!', *UI*, Sept. 1968.
119.'Republican Clubs Plan Future Action', *UI*, Oct. 1968.
120.E. McCann, *War and an Irish Town* (London, 1980), p. 35.

could have represented the whole thing as a sectarian riot.'[121]

As the civil rights marches progressed, so the IRA's fears were borne out, as the number of clashes with the police increased. One march in January 1969 from Belfast to Derry, led by the student based People's Democracy party, gained particular notoriety. When the marchers reached the village of Burntollet Bridge, Co. Londonderry, they were attacked by a loyalist gang. The police stood aside and it later emerged that some of the attackers were off-duty members of the police auxiliary force, the B Specials. However, IRA leaders like Roy Johnston were annoyed with the march organisers whom he called an 'immature ultra-leftist element'. The march itself he described as 'ill-advised and provocative'. 'Burntollet need not have happened', Johnston said, 'It achieved nothing except to inflame sectarian hatred.'[122] From the beginning of 1969 Northern Ireland imploded. The disruption which accompanied civil rights marches developed into riots and running street battles between the police and Catholic and Protestant mobs. Events culminated in August 1969 with the introduction of British Army units onto the street of Derry and Belfast to restore law and order.

Northern Ireland's plunge into violent chaos severely damaged the IRA's design to peacefully transform the civil rights campaign into a broad non-sectarian movement. Where the republican leadership had perhaps been mistaken was in assuming that sectarian conflict could, in the long run, ever have been avoided. The depth of communal hostility was always likely to transcend any latent feelings of cross-community working class solidarity, if such a thing ever existed in the first place. The IRA tacitly admitted that the violent reactions of the authorities to the civil rights marches had dented its faith in the ability of the Stormont administration to reform itself when it called on the British government to impose civil rights

121.'Unionists Fear Civil Rights', *UI*, Oct. 1968.
122.Quoted in Cronin, p. *Irish Nationalism* p. 190.

reforms on Ulster.'[123] In fact, by late 1969 the IRA's entire strategic construct had been unravelled. The prospect of Catholic-Protestant working class unity had disappeared. Furthermore, in the process of trying to preserve its non-sectarian stance, many republicans felt that the IRA had abrogated its traditional role in the North as the defenders of the Catholic population, so leaving nationalist areas at the mercy of Protestant rioters. The sight of Catholics in the Bogside area of Derry welcoming the arrival of the British Army as protectors was especially galling. Responsibility for this humiliation was laid at the door of the leadership, with the result that Goulding and his cohorts presided over an increasingly divided movement.

Such was the background to the split in the IRA's ranks which occurred towards the end of 1969. The events which led to the split have been well covered elsewhere and require no detailed elaboration here. The rift was sparked by the decision to resurrect the proposal to end the policy of abstention in order to allow republican candidates to take their seats, if elected. The leadership claimed that it was a necessary move to stop 'political opportunists' from capitalising on the IRA's agitationary activities and to enable the movement to 'use the tactics best suited to the occasion to smash the power of the establishment, North and South.'[124] An extra-ordinary Army Convention, meeting in December 1969, agreed to the lifting of the restraints on electoral participation and also to the formation of the so-called national liberation front. For the opponents of the leadership, these ideas were a fanciful distraction and the final straw for those like MacStiofain.'[125] After the Convention, MacStiofain and his followers met under the banner of a new body, the Provisional Army Council, to repudiate the IRA resolutions and to pledge 'allegiance to the 32-County Irish Republic proclaimed at Easter 1916, established by the first Dail Eireann in 1919,

123.See 'Resistance', *UI*, Sept. 1969.
124.'The IRA in the 70s', *UI*, Jan. 1970.
125. See MacStiofain, pp. 130-137.

overthrown by force of arms in 1922 and suppressed to this day by the existing British imposed Six-County and 26-County partition states."[126] The break was formalised at the Sinn Fein Ard-Fheis held on 11 January 1970. When the resolution to abolish abstentionism was pushed through about one third of the delegates walked out. There were now two Irish Republican Armies - one under Goulding, referred to as the Official IRA (OIRA), and the other led by MacStiofain, the Provisional IRA (PIRA).

Because the rupture occurred over the issue of abstention, the events from late 1969 onwards can appear as a straight traditionalist-revisionist split.[127] This is too simple. While abstention was certainly the immediate cause for contention the roots of the division went deeper and concerned the whole course of the 1960s rethink, the nature of the IRA leadership's policy towards developments in the North and the movement's non-performance in the riots of August 1969. Those who broke from OIRA were not, therefore, members of one single faction, more a coalition of forces who, for one reason or another, opposed the IRA leadership. This coalition can be categorised into three groups. By looking at the motives of each group in turn, not only can we gain a more precise picture of the split, but we will be able to see the centrality of the argument concerning the role of the mili-tary instrument in the whole controversy.

The first group can certainly be described as the traditionalist faction. They were by no means the most numerous group, but they were predominant within the Provisionals' leadership. They were people mainly from the South, often veterans of the 1956-62 border war. They had been hostile to Goulding's new thinking from the outset, hence they were the most organised of the three groups. As has been mentioned above, opposition during the sixties centred on the Committee for Revolutionary Action. Although the

126.Irish Republican Publicity Bureau (IRPB), Statement 28 Dec. 1969, reprinted in *AP*, Feb. 1970.
127.See Cronin, *Irish Nationalism*, p. 196.

Committee remained a shadowy and indistinct contingent, it is plausible to suggest that its members were those who comprised the Provisionals' first echelon, people like Daithi O'Conaill, Ruairi O'Bradaigh and his brother Sean, and possibly MacStiofain as well. The fact that the CRA's newsheet, *An Phoblacht*, became the Provisionals' chief mouthpiece in the South lends weight to this supposition. As self-proclaimed guardians of the republican heritage, the CRA saw Goulding and his cronies as reformists and compromisers who were diluting the IRA's struggle with their fangled ideas of political campaigning. The CRA asserted that 'the traditional programme of Republicanism is revolutionary, and therefore can only be realised through unqualified revolutionary action.'[128] In case there was any doubt over what was meant by the term 'revolutionary action' the CRA spelled out that: 'Force is the mailed fist of revolutionary principles.'[129]

What differentiates the traditionalists above all from the rest, was the probability that they would have broken away irrespective of whether the Northern situation had erupted or not. Over two years before the actual break took place *An Phoblacht* had openly canvassed the possibility of a split if and when the 'Sinn Fein "Progressives"', as they were labelled, made their 'final move to integrate with Free State politics'.[130] The CRA counselled against any premature action which could shatter the movement into a welter of splinter groups, but warned that 'real revolutionary Republicans' should be in a 'position to swiftly regroup Republican activists in a new organisation when events dictate that this is essential to the perpetuation of Republican objects.'[131] For the traditionalists, abstentionism was an emotive subject and its proposed abolition represented the crowning betrayal of republican orthodoxy. MacStiofain declared that the choice was 'between

128.*AP* (CRA), May/June 1967.
129.*AP* (CRA), Jan. 1967.
130.*AP* (CRA), Oct. 1967.
131.*Ibid*..

accepting the institutions of partition or upholding the basic Republican principle of Ireland's right to national unity."[132] Developments in the North added a new element to the traditionalists' case. They believed that the civil rights campaign could be manipulated to allow eventually the IRA to undertake 'offensive action... on the main national objective of ending British rule."[133] Frustrated both ideologically and practically by the IRA leadership, the traditionalists decided that their ambitions could be best served in a separate organisation.

The second group, and almost certainly the largest component within the Provisionals, can be classified as the Northern republicans. Many were young enthusiasts who were to provide the majority of PIRA's foot-soldiers. At their head were a group of older, mainly Belfast based republicans like Joe Cahill, Francis Card and Billy McKee. Although the Northerners undoubtedly shared many of the traditionalists' aspirations, they were less political in the sense that their paramount concern was not national unity but to obtain guns to secure the defence of Catholic districts. The older republicans especially, had been deeply depressed by the IRA's failure to safeguard Catholic areas in August 1969 for which they blamed Goulding's leadership. Commenting on the welcome accorded by Catholics to the British Army, Joe Cahill said, 'people were glad to see them because the IRA had betrayed them."[134] In particular, anger was directed at a statement from Goulding which claimed that IRA units had been sent to the North and had played 'their part in defensive operations in Bogside, Derry'."[135] This was a fabrication. There had been virtually no centrally co-ordinated IRA

132.MacStiofain, p. 134.
133.*Ibid.*, p. 113.
134.Quoted in P. Bishop and E. Mallie, *The Provisional IRA* (London, 1987), p. 92.
135.C. Goulding, IRA Statement, *UI*, Sept. 1969. The original report was carried in *The Irish Times*, 19 Aug. 1969.

activity during the August riots.[136] It transpired, according to MacStiofain, that the statement had been concocted by the Dublin GHQ to pre-empt the British government from stepping in to abolish Stormont by giving credence to unionist claims that the riots had been fomented by the IRA.[137] The reasoning was that as Stormont was an Irish parliament, it could be democratically reformed and would evolve into an anti-imperialist body. If direct British rule was imposed any such prospect would be lost. By this time, many republicans felt that the leadership's thinking had slipped into the realms of absurdity and that the non-sectarian approach had become incredible. Goulding and his followers had believed that the rise of the civil rights movement signalled the success of the initial stage of their Northern design - 'the first effective political weapon which has been forged by the anti-unionist forces', as Tomas MacGiolla called it[138] - when in reality it was the prelude to Northern Ireland's political disintegration. For many Northerners, the Dublin leadership's vision of inter-communal harmony rang hollow while Protestant mobs were on the rampage through Catholic neighbourhoods. The IRA leaders themselves were caught in a vice. If they stuck to their policy of doing as little as possible to antagonise the Protestants, they would lose much Catholic backing. Conversely, by moving to the defence of Catholic areas, they would undermine their anti-sectarian image which had been one of the main pillars of their thinking since the mid-1960s. Within the ranks of the Belfast IRA disillusionment was so strong that in September 1969 they made up their own minds about the quality of the leadership they had been receiving by withdrawing their allegiance to the Dublin GHQ. This pre-existing split set the tone in the months after the formal break had occurred with many Northern IRA units and

136.See J. Mounter, 'Doubts on Role of IRA in Belfast Gun Battles', *The Times*, 27 Aug. 1969.
137.MacStiofain, pp. 125-127.
138.T. MacGiolla, Speech to 1968 Sinn Fein Ard-Fheis, reprinted in *UI*, Jan. 1969.

new recruits flocking to PIRA's side. Yet for OIRA, although the Northern tumult had provided an unwanted catalyst for the split, the logical end-game of its socialist-republican philosophy *was* the eventual eradication of the Catholic-defender tradition from its doctrine. Ultimately, the Officials were probably glad to see the backs of their erstwhile colleagues in the belief that they had got rid of a conservative-militarist millstone. But the price for this was the forfeiting of the support of many in the North who wanted protection, not some distant illusion of a workers' paradise. Cahill summed up the basic nature of PIRA's appeal: 'We receive our support from the Nationalist people and it is our job to defend them.'[139]

The third group were those like the young Gerry Adams who were sympathetic to many of the ideas contained in the 1960s rethink, but who fundamentally disagreed with the IRA leadership's analysis of events in the North. Adams has written approvingly of the 'small, politically conscious organisation' that was beginning to emerge from the 1960s review and of the need for agitationary work to 'enlist mass support'.[140] Adams has also claimed that the depiction of the 1970 rift as a traditionalist-revisionist split resulted in the 'simplistic projection of the "Stickies" [Provisional slang for the Officials] as politically conscious radicals with the "provisionals" as nationalist militarists.'[141] This group of mainly Northern radicals felt that the leadership had gravely under-estimated the reactionary nature of the Northern Irish state. Since sectarianism, they argued, was a phenomenon deliberately cultivated to pit Irish people against each other in order to maintain British rule, then the unionist establishment could always manippulate the sectarian issue to keep the Protestants on side. *Ipso facto*, the Northern state was inherently irreformable. The implication of this interpretation was that as long as the British connection lasted, so the

139.Quoted in Cronin, p. 204.
140.Adams, *The Politics of Irish Freedom*, p. 8.
141.G. Adams, 'Adams on Republicanism and Socialism', *Fortnight*, Sept. 1983.

notion of cross-community working class solidarity would be unattainable. Therefore, the leadership's faith in the reform process was felt to be misplaced and merely constituted 'temporising in front of the Orange ascendancy' which could only lead 'to a total dilution of Republicanism.'[142] The radicals felt that their assessment had been confirmed by the authorities' violent reaction to the civil rights marches and, consequently, shared the same resentment at the leadership's complacency during the August disturbances. The radicals were undoubtedly the smallest and least important faction at the time of the split, but being highly motivated politically they were to move swiftly through the Provisionals' ranks to positions of influence in the years ahead.

When the Provisionals issued their first statement detailing the reasons why they had broken with OIRA, the areas of overlap between the various shades of opinion within PIRA were defined more precisely. The statement listed five areas of disagreement; 1) the ending of abstention and the recognition that this was deemed to confer on the Westminster, Stormont and Leinster House parliaments; 2) the failure to offer adequate protection to 'our people in the North' during August 1969; 3) the controversy over the leadership's insistence that Stormont should be preserved; 4) the movement's tendency to 'an extreme form of Socialism'; and finally 5) the methods used by the leadership to counter dissent through the expulsion of members who objected to the politicisation process.[143] There were slight incongruities here and there. For instance, the reference to extreme socialism and the description of PIRA's own brand of socialism as being based on 'Christian values' may well have jarred with the more secular minded radicals. In this sense, the statement reflected a largely traditionalist perspective, though the movement strenuously resisted the militarist-traditionalist tag.

142.*Ibid.*.
143.PSF Statement, *AP*, Feb. 1970.

However, there is little doubt that the belief in the value of armed force, both to sever the British connection and to protect Catholic areas, was the central unifying thread which bound the factions together. There was no outward expression of the willingness to open up a military campaign, though it was conveyed by inference, for example, by stating the preference for a 'direct confrontation with the British Government on Irish soil'.[144] There were, naturally, different qualitites of commitment to the use of force. The traditionalist faction, with the Catholic defenders in tow, were the most instinctively affiliated to the armed struggle, whereas the radicals were probably inclined to view military action in more functional terms, though they were no less convinced of its necessity at the time.

What emerges about the OIRA/PIRA split was that it was not the result of a violent spasm in August 1969, but was a process that had a long lead time extending back to the very early stages of strategic review in the mid-1960s. Nevertheless, it is perhaps somewhat ironic to note that, hitherto, the only consistent attempt in republican history to develop a more politically conscious strategy which sought to separate the military instrument from, and subordinate it to, policy requirements should have come undone so quickly when it was placed under strain for the first time during the August riots. The organisation which had done all the talking about the obligation to be responsive to popular needs manifestly failed to react to the calls for help from the people who were its natural supporters in the North. As a result, Catholics turned increasingly to the Provisionals who were willing to offer them the practical assistance which OIRA leaders seemed intent on denying. For many Northern Catholic 'workers', OIRA's new model strategy was not simply doctrinally inflexible; it was irrelevant.

Meanwhile, on the flipside, hardly any Protestants trusted the Officials either. The sincerity of OIRA's commitment to build a mass movement that

144. *Ibid.*.

could genuinely span the sectarian divide cannot be disputed. But the process by which it was believed this could be achieved was presumptuously mechanistic. The assumption, which to varying degrees the Provisionals also shared, that Protestants would discover their true national consciousness once the 'terrorising political conformity forced upon them'[145] by the imperialist tool of unionism had been lifted, was certainly a condescending argument, if not an actual sectarian view in itself. Occasionally, when socialist-republicans of the sixties inveighed against what was termed 'the Scotch-Irish nonsense',[146] meaning a separate Protestant-Irish identity, they sometimes seemed to blur even further the line between criticism of a specific philosophy of loyalism and the more atavistic responses generated by inter-communal suspicion and hostility.

The Theory and Practice of Political Control - The Officials Finally Tame the Military Tiger

Attempting to review the IRA's military experience from the 1920s through to the early 1970s is a difficult task, not only because of the extensive time frame, but also because the period traverses some of the most complex developments in the movement's history; developments which help dispel what might otherwise be attractive, but inaccurate, suppositions about the republican strategic tradition than if one had merely studied, say, the events from the 1970 split onwards.

It is evident that from the early twenties until the end of the border war in 1962, the military instrument in republican strategy had become an independent dynamic, almost entirely disconnected from any serious consideration as to whether such means were appropriate to the attainment of the movement's political goals. The employment of force was based less on realistic calculations of its utility, given the resources at the IRA's

145.'Unionism and Paisley - An Analysis'.
146.*Ibid.*.

disposal, and more by the inclination to fulfil the doctrinal imperative to engage in military action. This restraint on the proper application of violence to aid the achievement of political objectives made the republican movement an impossible place for the more politically sighted elements, like de Valera and his followers. In effect, republican military thinking defied the very concept of strategic rationality, as the military instrument ended up serving the ends of ideology, not the ends of policy.

The abject failure of the 1956-62 border campaign brought home the futility of IRA militarism to its leaders who resolved to try to restore some semblance of political authority over the use of violence. To a casual observer it may have been easy to assume that republican strategic thinking was entrenched and immobile. The 1960s reassessment disproves this, showing that the movement was neither impervious to self-criticism nor unable to challenge key republican tenets, like abstentionism and the primacy of the armed struggle, though admittedly, only under the threat of extinction, as Garland accepted: 'It was only when we were beaten to the wall and almost annihilated as a political force that the true meaning of revolution began to dawn on us.'[147] We can question the validity of the leadership's ideas about social revolution, but the reassessment did attempt to critically examine the correlation of ends and means in republican strategy. In this way, the social revolutionary concept set out the theoretical context in which the military instrument could be subjected to greater political control by redefining it as a single tactical component within a far wider political framework aimed at winning popular support.

The real fly in the ointment for the IRA's leadership was the outbreak of the Northern conflagration in the late 1960s. It is possible to speculate endlessly about the course of the social revolutionary approach had events not flared up when they did. As it happened, the situation in the

147.J. (Sean) Garland, 'Building Revolution', *UI*, May 1971.

North provided another compelling reason for the anti-leadership coalition to break away. However, what the early years of conflict demonstrated, was the tension between the theory and practice of OIRA's new strategy. It was one thing to devise a mechanism to control the military instrument in the abstract, quite another to implement it in the midst of the violent turmoil that had engulfed Northern Ireland. In particular, these years illustrated the difficulty that the Officials had in trying to escape their militarist past. OIRA was trapped between its formal non-sectarian, gradualist policies and the highly charged atmosphere of the times which seemed to call for a more traditional military response. In mid-1971 Garland warned the movement against allowing itself to be swept up by the gathering momentum of PIRA's violence: 'Unfortunately, because of our history as a movement committed to force, we are liable to be brought down along with these elements'.[148] At the beginning of 1972 OIRA reaffirmed its position towards Northern Ireland:

> It has never been and is not now our intention to launch a purely military campaign against British forces in the North. We have seen the failures of past campaigns based on military action only and have set our faces against such campaigns which are doomed to failure. We do not see, nor do we want a repetition of the fifties.[149]

Such sentiments seemed discordant when matched with OIRA's actions both in late 1971 and early 1972. Disregarding Garland's warnings, the Officials were sounding increasingly bombastic. In a speech in mid-1971 Goulding had declared that the only answer to the repressive actions of the 'forces of imperialism and exploitation' must be 'in the language that brings these vultures to their senses most effectively, the language of the bomb and the bullet'.[150] This belligerence was later to manifest itself in a series of actions which put its non-sectarian credentials at risk with the killing of the unionist politician, Senator Jack Barnhill, in December 1971, followed by

148.*Ibid.*.
149.'IRA New Year Statement', *UI*, Jan. 1972.
150.Quoted in *The Irish Times*, 9 July 1971, cited in Hepburn, p. 190.

an assassination attempt on another unionist, John Taylor MP, in February 1972. The worst incident also happened in February when an OIRA bomb planted at the Aldershot headquarters of the Parachute Regiment killed 7 people, including 5 women canteen workers and a Catholic priest. The Officials' justified the Aldershot bombing as retaliation for the 'Bloody Sunday' shootings, Derry, 31 January 1972, when 13 people were killed by paratroopers during a civil rights demonstration.'[151] Overall, the bombings and shootings left OIRA's image severely tarnished. All the innovatory ideas of a non-sectarian, non-militarist, all-Ireland agitationary movement appeared to have fallen by the wayside in favour of a violent preoccupation with the Northern conflict.

It is almost inconceivable that OIRA's descent into a frenzy of destruction reflected the true wishes of Goulding and his partners. In truth, OIRA's violent spree represented less of an ideological reversion to full-scale militarism and more a desperate attempt to curb the flow of support to the Provisionals. Viewed in this light, we can see how important military symbolism was to the republican tradition in general and how crucial the Officials believed to be the preservation of a military role, not so much for its political instrumentality, but as a means to sustain their legitimacy. In this battle for the moral high ground of republicanism, OIRA's attempts to 'out-militarise' the Provisionals were never likely to succeed. By 1972 Goulding was prepared to concede this point. 'What helps the Provos most in the North', he claimed, 'was that every Catholic youth is a Provo at heart.'[152]

Throughout March and April 1972 the Official IRA's campaign continued at full-swing. On 21 May, OIRA shot dead William Best, an off-duty soldier on home leave in Derry. The killing produced widespread anger against the

151.'Para HQ Blasted at Aldershot', *UI*, March 1972.
152.Goulding Statement in Sweetman, p. 147.

Officials and led the OIRA Army Council to reconsider its campaign in Northern Ireland. On 29 May 1972, OIRA announced a ceasefire, though it reserved the right to act in self-defence and undertake defensive operations. The announcement was made only after much acrimonious debate inside the organisation. Opposition to any cessation of hostilities came from a militant ultra-leftist faction led by Seamus Costello and from OIRA representatives in Belfast and Derry who feared that a ceasefire would be both difficult to enforce on local activists and would allow the Provisionals to extend their influence at OIRA's expense.[153] At the practical level, the ceasefire appeared to have little effect. After all, the reservation of the right to take defensive action had been OIRA's officially stated position all along. The organisation had never formally declared an offensive. OIRA operations simply persisted on through 1972 and 1973. The true significance of the 29 May announcement was that it marked the start of Goulding's push to put theory into practice by once and for all reining-in OIRA's military elements under his own authority. The problem, as leading Officials in the North had already identified, was that OIRA's violence was being driven along more by the fervour of local operatives than official sanction. In this respect, the ceasefire order was a clever balance between the reality of local autonomy on the ground and the longer term intentions of the leadership. Allowing local units to continue their operations under the defensive clause provided a theoretical justification for OIRA's violence while giving Goulding the scope to disengage progressively the organisation from the military struggle. The ceasefire announcement served the first stage in this process as a rhetorical cut-off point, beyond which the leadership ceased to back openly military initiatives. Further attacks were sanctioned by the Dublin GHQ after the ceasefire, but from May onwards permission for operations was gently scaled down while front line units in the North were

153.Patterson, pp. 140-141.

slowly deprived of the resources and equipment necessary to keep the campaign going.'[154] Through shrewd bureaucratic manipulation, Goulding was able to apply a steadily more stringent interpretation of the terms of the ceasefire. In effect, by the end of 1973, OIRA's military campaign had been defused by stealth, finally fulfilling the essential desideratum of the sixties' strategic reappraisal.

The gradual winding down of OIRA's military activities did not pass without imposing further strain on the organisation. The militants under Costello remained implacably opposed to the ceasefire. This faction eventually broke away to form the Irish Republican Socialist Party (IRSP) in December 1974. Along with its military arm, the Irish National Liberation Army, the IRSP went on to enjoy an extremely violent history (INLA's most notable exploit was the killing of the Conservative Northern Ireland spokesman, Airey Neave in March 1979) but its influence waned when INLA descended into bitter factionalism in the mid-1980s. Any other objectors either drifted off to join PIRA or simply dropped out of republican politics altogether. Once the IRSP faction had removed itself, the Officials had no real internal military constituency to answer to, freeing them to develop their political programme by directing the movement's efforts ostensibly towards the South where its prospects seemed brightest. During the 1970s the Officials were to become embroiled in a number of violent feuds both with PIRA and INLA (OIRA assassinated Seamus Costello in 1977) but the military instrument was never employed as the main arm of policy, and by the end of the decade OIRA had largely faded from the scene. There were periodic reports in the 1980s of the Official IRA's continued military activities,'[155] but by this time, the crown of physical force republicanism had long since passed to the Provisionals.

154.'In the Shadow of a Gunman', Part 1, *Magill*, April 1982.
155.See *ibid.* See also Part 2, *Magill*, May 1982.

CHAPTER 4

THE MILITARY INSTRUMENT IN THE ASCENDANT - THE PROVISIONAL IRA ON THE OFFENSIVE, 1970-1972

The fracturing of the republican movement in early 1970 left the Provisionals in a distinct minority. Although PIRA more or less cleaned up in Belfast, obtaining the allegiance of 9 of the 13 IRA units in the city,[1] elsewhere in the province its membership was patchy. In the country areas the Officials tended to hold sway. The division of 1970 had caused as much confusion inside republican ranks as outside, and so units untouched by the turbulent events of 1969 on the whole remained cautious and stayed with the Officials, even though their sympathies may have lain with PIRA. In spite of being a 'one-town' organisation, PIRA's position at the beginning of 1970 was fortuitous. It was Belfast which was the focus of attention because it was there that sectarian tensions were most inflamed. In the months of inter-sectarian rioting ahead, it was the Provisionals who were to gain most in publicity terms. In the space of a year the Provisionals had effectively superceded the Officials as the main republican driving force in Northern Ireland. From these origins, the Provisional IRA was to embark on a systematic campaign of military confrontation. The years between 1970 and 1972 were to see PIRA's military activity reach a scale of intensity that has never since been matched. The aim of this chapter is to explore in detail both the theory and practice of PIRA's offensive. The chapter begins by setting out how the Provisionals first consolidated their hold in Catholic areas by acting as a community defence force and then moved off onto the offensive, launching an all out assault against the structures of Northern Irish government and society. Attention will be focused on exploring the theoretical mechanics of PIRA's offensive and how they worked out in practice, particularly in relation to the fall of the Stormont government in

1. MacStiofain, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*, p. 138.

1972 which proved to be a landmark in the Provisionals' campaign. The enquiry then looks at how the Provisionals sought to mix their violence with political initiatives to induce the British government to talk to them. The latter part of the chapter examines how a combination of internal factionalism and ideological rigidity prevented PIRA from capitalising on its political advantages and impelled the movement to take military risks which undermined its bargaining position with the British.

The Provisional IRA Army Council met in January 1970 to decide on the outline of the movement's strategy. The Council agreed that its first priority was to devote the movement's resources to establish an adequate defensive force. Ensuring that PIRA was equipped to protect Catholic neighbourhoods was to be only the first step in the gradual build-up to an offensive. It was Sean MacStiofain's intention that: 'As soon as it became feasible and practical, the IRA would move from a purely defensive position into a phase of combined defence and retaliation.'[2]

During the first few months of 1970 the Provisionals remained very much in the shadows. Catholics were not automatically drawn towards the organisation. Most were content to place their faith in the ability of the British Army to protect them from the visitations of loyalist rioters. Naturally, committed republicans saw the Army not as benign guardians but as the enemy whose job it was to underwrite unionist rule. MacStiofain felt that 'with its imperial mentality'[3] the Army would be unable to retain Catholic confidence for long.

As the inter-communal strife continued to boil over onto the streets of Belfast, the Army increasingly resorted to heavy-handed methods to suppress the disturbances. The use of CS riot gas and baton charges became commonplace and all helped to fulfil the predictions of those like MacStiofain by

2. *Ibid.*, p. 146.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 146.

eroding Catholic support for the Army. Two incidents in particular helped swing Catholic opinion. The first happened in late March when troops tried to disperse a crowd of young Catholics on the Ballymurphy Estate in West Belfast. Soldiers used CS gas and then charged the crowd causing mayhem all over the Estate. This event was followed by further large-scale clashes in the area over the next few days as the Army battled it out with Catholic and Protestant rioters. It was during this time that barricades started proliferating, both in Ballymurphy and other Catholic districts. The barricades, some of which had been up in the Creggan and Bogside areas of Derry since the riots of August 1969, were largely an instinctive response by Catholic residents to prevent incursions by loyalist mobs. The Army allowed the barricades to remain in place and tried to co-operate with the local citizen defence committees which manned them in the belief that this would help defuse the tension.[4] Because these districts were left alone by the Army they became effective 'no-go' areas for the security forces. The result was to permit the Provisionals to take root behind the barricades and to eventually control the areas. From these areas they were able to recruit and build up their organisation. The second major incident of 1970 came in early July when the Army imposed a curfew on the Lower Falls district of West Belfast in order to search the area for weapons. The curfew, which was in fact illegal, was carried out with particular severity. Four men were shot dead by the Army during the operation. In both instances, the harsh reaction by the Army cemented nationalist solidarity and boosted support for the Provisionals, providing them with their first big influx of recruits.[5] The Lower Falls curfew was an especially notable blunder as the district was a stronghold of the Officals who had been following a strict policy of non-confrontation with the Army.

4. See D. Hamill, *Pig in the Middle* (London, 1985), pp. 72-73.
5. See *The Sunday Times* Insight Team, *Ulster* (London, 1972), p. 204.

There was a widespread feeling in the early 1970s that the rioting and general street disturbances of this period had been orchestrated by the Provisionals as a part of a deliberate strategy to weaken the relationship between the Army and the Catholic community.[6] PIRA was certainly hoping for such a breakdown, and doubtless there were some *agent provocateurs* involved, but there is little to suggest that confrontations with the Army had been intentionally provoked from the start. Usually, the Army was sucked into the violence by inter-sectarian feuding. For example, in the Ballymurphy disturbances the Army had intervened to prevent the Catholic youths from ambushing an Orange parade which the authorities had allowed to march through the area.[7] Although the Army's rough treatement was handed out to both Catholics and Protestants in equal measure, it had an especially alienating effect on Catholics who grew to share the Provisionals' perception of a force trying to protect, not the Catholic population, but the repressive Unionist party government at Stormont.

PIRA's stock within the Catholic community rose in proportion to the decline of the Army's popularity as the movement increasingly made its name as an energetic defence force. Understanding PIRA's defensive role helps to explain how it was able to mount such a formidable politico-military challenge in the years to come. The Provisionals derived genuine popular kudos from fulfilling such a practical function. For example, in June 1970 PIRA units were able to repel an invasion by thousands of loyalists of the Catholic enclave of the Short Strand in East Belfast while the Army was seemingly nowhere in sight. Conor Cruise O'Brien has remarked that PIRA's most potent asset 'was its simple relevance to the situation.'[8] PIRA was not advocating stoic pacifism as the civil rights movement and the Catholic

6. See for example R. Moss, 'The Security of Ulster', in *Conflict Studies*, Nov. 1971 (London, Institute for the Study of Conflict), p 18.
7. Bishop and Mallie, *The Provisional IRA*, p. 114.
8. C. Cruise O'Brien, *States of Ireland* (London, 1972), pp. 205-207.

Church were both tending to do, nor waiting around for the Officials' non-sectarian conditions to materialise, but offering to resist actively any transgressions against the Catholic community. PIRA's popularity, in the main, was not forced but rested on the legitimacy acquired from its protective role.[9] Accordingly, one newspaper reported that in some ghetto areas of Belfast PIRA 'enjoys almost total support from ordinary people and is not as isolated as the Government believes.'[10] Although its popular base was often to prove conditional on the continuing perception of the Provisionals as a defensive force, PIRA had nevertheless, succeeded in establishing a firm wedge inside the Catholic community on which it could work to expand its struggle.'[11]

As MacStiofain's plans displayed, the Provisional IRA was never conceived solely as a defensive organisation. The Provisionals regarded themselves as the rightful heirs to the republican historical tradition and ardently maintained the idea of the incomplete national revolution, as Ruairi O'Bradaigh stated: 'Our Movement bases itself on Ireland's National rights, and the right of the Irish people to the ownership of Ireland... That is the main basis on which we rest our case. We also rest it on the natural and historic right of resistance to British rule'.'[12] Yet, in public at least, the Provisionals were coy about what form the resistance would take. The only action to which they had openly committed themselves was to the vague proposition to 'support all efforts to defend our people in the Six Counties.'[13] They were prepared to hint at possible violent consequences, but only in the context of Army provocation, as for instance, when Daithi

9. See F. Burton, *The Politics of Legitimacy* (London, 1978), pp. 68-127, especially p. 106.
10. 'IRA versus the Provisionals', *The Observer*, 14 Feb. 1971.
11. D. Mansfield and T. Rogerson, 'IRA in Northern Ireland', in B. O'Neill, *et al*, (eds.), *Political Violence and Insurgency* (Arvada, Colorado, 1974), p. 130.
12. Interview with R. O'Bradaigh, *This Week*, 16 Aug. 1970.
13. PSF Statement, *AP*, Feb. 1970.

O'Conaill warned the British that: 'The more your troops impose their will, the nearer you bring the day of open confrontation.'[14] The plans for pro-active military operations were, for the time being, kept firmly under wraps. Even so, the Provisionals' adherence to republican orthodoxy, with its stress on the colonial interpretation of Ireland's relationship with Britain, predisposed them to see the route to Irish unity lying through military action.

The belief that Northern Ireland was a product of British imperialism influenced the way PIRA looked on the Protestant population. The Provisionals subscribed whole heartedly to the view that the Protestants were simply being used as collaborators to maintain Britain's control of Ireland. It was assumed that once Britain had withdrawn from the North, the Protestants, being 'hard-headed, sensible' and 'very realistic', (though not apparently as hard-headed or sensible to realise that they were the witless dupes of the British) would soon come to terms with the situation and accept 'that the best thing to do would be to participate in the building of the new Ireland.'[15] Ever since 1969 there had been speculation about an overwhelming Protestant backlash against the Catholic community.[16] Apart from the loyalist riots, there was no all-engulfing onslaught. Consequently, the Provisionals were content to play down the prospect of mass Protestant resistance, describing the possibility of a backlash as 'over-rated'.[17] The Provisionals paid lip-service to secular adages about how the 'movement must be based on the common working people of Ireland, North and South, Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter',[18] but in practice, the notion that the Protestants should be concilated, at least in the terms envisaged by the Officials, was resolutely squashed, in MacStiofain's words: 'You've got to have military

14. D. O'Conaill, Bodenstown Speech, *AP*, July 1970.
15. *Belfast Telegraph* interview with R. O'Bradaigh, reprinted in *AP*, Sept. 1971.
16. See for example, 'Protestant Dog Ready to Bite', *The Sunday Times*, 24 Aug. 1969.
17. *Belfast Telegraph* interview with O'Bradaigh.
18. 'Our Aims and Methods', *AP*, March 1970.

victory first and then politicise the people afterwards. To say you've got to unite the Catholic and Protestant working class is just utter rubbish."[19]

So, although for the greater part of 1970 PIRA kept a low profile by avoiding direct military contact with the British Army, the movement was gearing itself up for the opening of hostilities. Feelings amongst PIRA's ranks had been running high for some time. 'I would dearly love to have a go at the British troops', said one activist, but added with caution: 'We will go on the offensive at the right time. Our policy at present is not to take the initiative.'[20] By October, however, the movement felt sufficiently prepared to begin the third phase of MacStiofain's strategy - the launching of 'all-out offensive action against the British occupation system.'[21]

The Shift to the Offensive - The Theory and Practice of Psychological Attrition

In October 1970, PIRA began a systematic bombing campaign, directed ostensibly at commercial targets. By the end of the year there had been 153 explosions. At the beginning of 1971 the Army Council authorised attacks against the British Army,[22] and on 6 February the first British soldier was killed. The attacks increased, though a Provisional spokesman, Leo Martin, insisted that operations were 'still confined to acts of retaliation against the British Army.'[23] It was only in October 1971 that MacStiofain formally announced that PIRA's fight had shifted to an 'offensive campaign of resistance in all parts of the occupied area.'[24] During 1971 there were 1756 shootings, 1515 bombing incidents and 174 deaths. The violence rose dramatically the following year to 10,628 shootings and 1853 bombings which left

19. S. MacStiofain, Statement in Sweetman, *On Our Knees*, p. 156.
20. Quoted in *The Times*, 7 April 1970.
21. MacStiofain, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*, p. 146.
22. Bishop and Mallie, p. 135.
23. Quoted in *The Irish Times*, 18 March 1971.
24. S. MacStiofain, Statement from Army Council, *RN*, 30 Oct. 1971.

467 dead, 208 of which were the result of known PIRA activity.[25]

The nature of the political objective that the Provisional IRA set itself was, for a relatively small, minority based movement, a formidable task. To achieve the complete removal of the British presence and the integration of Northern Ireland into a wholly new unitary political entity would require a highly potent strategy. Propaganda exhortations aside, the Provisionals were realistic enough to accept that, given the disparity of resources between themselves and the British, they would be unable to defeat the British Army in any conventional military sense. Nor could they hope to achieve victory in Maoist terms through the slow accumulation of small military victories eventually to outmatch and defeat the security forces. However, they did believe it would be possible to wage a limited form of war 'until Britain is forced to sit at the conference table' to negotiate on PIRA's terms.[26] To this end, the Provisionals utilised a multi-layered strategy which was composed of a series of distinct intermediate and long-term political and military goals which would enable the Provisionals' offensive to progressively attain its overall objective. This can be expressed diagrammatically as in Figure 1 (page 204).

Theoretically, the Provisionals strategy started from a premise put forward by Robert Taber that an insurgent victory was possible in any scenario where, for whatever reason, the enemy was unable to apply sufficient force to wipe out any revolutionary movement.[27] In such circumstances, the insurgent has the opportunity to manipulate individual military engagements to generate a degree of coercive psychological pressure out of

25. Figures for shootings and bombing incidents (including devices defused) from *Irish Information Agenda* (London, 1987), Table B71. For deaths: Table B1vi p. 1 and Table 1 in W. Flackes and S. Elliott, *Northern Ireland: A Political Directory*, (Belfast, 1989), p. 411.
26. 'Resist, Resist, Resist', *RN*, 4 Sept. 1971.
27. R. Taber, *War of the Flea* (London, 1972), p. 11.

Overleaf ——→

all proportion to their destructive consequences.[28] A sustained rate of small-scale military operations can, therefore, help to engender a high level of duress, which might lead the controlling power to concede to its opponent due to the inordinately high economic and political price incurred in trying to retain the contended object.[29] It is a process frequently referred to in insurgency theory as the 'asset-to-liability shift'.[30] One of the most important elements of an insurgent's military action in this respect is to challenge the authorities to respond without infringing the accepted moral norms of its own domestic polity. Responses which violate those norms may, particularly in liberal democratic societies, lead to a widespread belief that the authorities are over-reacting to the threat. The use of excessive repression may further devalue the former asset by de-legitimising government actions in the eyes of its own population, and so increase domestic pressure to yield to the insurgents.[31]

The asset-to-liability shift is both a complex and subtle strategy. It is a useful formula as it allows us to understand the role of force in low intensity strategies. Where military actions are not intended primarily to alter the balance of forces in any materially significant way, engagements will be used to demonstrate resolve. Insurgent violence will be aimed at exerting political leverage on the enemy actor. The point is that the insurgent cannot itself effect a decision, it has to induce the enemy to choose a course favourable to the insurgent's aims by using force, and the threat of force, to recast the atmosphere in which the enemy's political calculations are made.[32]

28. See E. Morris and A. Hoe, *Terrorism: Threat and Response* (London: 1987), p. 25.
29. See J. Bowyer Bell, *The Myth of the Guerrilla* (New York, 1971), p. 55.
30. See M. Tugwell, 'Politics and Propaganda of the Provisional IRA', in P. Wilkinson (ed.), *British Perspectives on Terrorism* (London, 1981), pp. 14-16.
31. See W. Waugh, *International Terrorism* (Salisbury N.C, 1982), pp. 107-113.
32. See Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, p. 3.

This type of theory of insurgent warfare reflects the experiences of many minor wars during the era of decolonisation after World War II, when rebel campaigns succeeded in altering perceptions in the colonial metropolis, thereby forcing the imperial powers to forsake their possessions in order to minimise public opprobrium on the international stage as well as to avoid the escalating costs of retention. To this extent, the basic theoretical mechanics of PIRA's strategy were little different from the IRA's campaign in the Anglo-Irish war fifty years previously, itself in many ways the prototype anti-colonial campaign of the twentieth century. It was entirely consonant with PIRA's outlook, with its image of Britain as the foreign oppressor, that it should seek to construct its strategy along the lines of the classical anti-colonial wars of the past. According to Maria McGuire, who was close to Army Council circles in the early 1970s, the Provisionals had keenly studied recent conflicts like those in Palestine, Cyprus and Aden where guerrilla campaigns had resulted in a British evacuation.[33] She also claimed that the Army Council set an initial target to kill 36 British soldiers because it was thought that this figure matched the number of troops killed in Aden and would supposedly impose enough pressure on the British to oblige them to negotiate.[34]

PIRA's strategic construct was not simply a retread of the Anglo-Irish war. There were three important differences which influenced the particular context of PIRA's campaign. First, PIRA's military operations were wholly confined to Northern Ireland. Second, PIRA had secured a political foothold amongst the Catholic populace, something that it had failed to achieve during the 1956-62 border war, which it could use to sustain a prolonged campaign. Finally, Northern Irish unionism was in crisis. The ruling Unionist party at Stormont, which had been in power since Northern Ireland's

33. M. McGuire, *To Take Arms* (London, 1973), p. 74.
34. *Ibid.*, pp. 74-75.

creation, had proved incapable of dealing with the civil rights issue when it blew up in 1968 and was now in the grip of a paralysing split between reformists and hardliners. The Unionist party and government was teetering on the brink of disintegration and appeared highly vulnerable to further destabilisation. All of these factors helped map out the direction of PIRA's strategy as they presented the movement with a prime opportunity to exploit the Northern crisis in order to engage the attention of the politicians and public in Great Britain - the key actors who it was felt had the real power to affect the political destiny of the province.

In summary then, the Provisional IRA was attempting to use its limited resources to wage a war of psychological attrition against the British. A constant level of military activity would transmit the political message that PIRA would continue operations until the British authorities acceded to its demands. The impression of chaos and instability in Northern Ireland would eventually exasperate public opinion which would increasingly demand to be extricated from the morass. Eventually, the British government's resolve would fail, causing it to finally relinquish political control of Northern Ireland.

PIRA's Strategy and the Fall of Stormont

The Provisionals believed that they could only embark on the final phase of their struggle to end British rule in Northern Ireland by getting the British government to intervene directly in the administration of the province. From PIRA's standpoint, so long as the Stormont government remained, the British could look on at a distance without involving itself on any significant scale. Moreover, in PIRA's view, Stormont's existence obfuscated the nature of its campaign. Many in the Provisionals' ranks believed that because PIRA's attacks, particularly those against the security forces, often

resulted in the deaths of Protestants, they were at war with the Protestant community. One Provisional admitted that many new recruits 'joined because they hated Protestants'.[35] PIRA spokesmen, though, were anxious to deny the sectarian label and to stress the real nature of their fight as they saw it: 'We have no fight with the Protestants, in fact we detest these terms "Protestant" and "Catholic"... Our fight is with the English for our God-given right to nationhood.'[36] The Provisionals argued that to bring about such a face-to-face fight with the English it was necessary, as an 'intermediate objective', to aim for the 'suspension of Stormont'.[37] This would open the way to the final offensive, because with Stormont gone, the 'British forces of occupation could then be clearly seen as forces of invasion on Irish soil.'[38] In other words, abolition would break the unionist power structure, and unambiguously expose the colonial relationship between Britain and Northern Ireland. The loyalists would then be able to see their true position as mere cogs in the British imperial system. Abolition would, as a consequence, 'establish the lines of demarcation... between those whose wish would be to sell their birthright and nationality and those who would strive to maintain it and defend it.'[39] Direct rule would turn the conflict into a straight forward confrontation between PIRA and the British, along with any remaining native collaborators. In turn, this would render the Westminster government susceptible to the pressure of public opinion over its policies in Northern Ireland.

To bring down Stormont and effect the asset-to-liability shift, PIRA needed to cause sufficient instability in Northern Ireland in order to create the perception of chaos and ungovernability. If Stormont was seen to be unable to deal with the political crisis, then the pressure on the British

35. Quoted in Bishop and Mallie, p. 140. See also Burton, p. 82.
36. Quoted in *The Times*, 30 July 1971.
37. *Belfast Telegraph* interview with O'Bradaigh.
38. *RN*, April 1971.
39. *Ibid.*.

government to intervene would be great. Concurrently, the image of a province in perpetual strife, paralysed by PIRA's operations, would help wear down mainland opinion.[40] Therefore, PIRA's initial political goal was, in O'Bradaigh's words, to 'rock Stormont and to keep it rocking until Stormont comes down.'[41]

The cutting edge of PIRA's strategy was its bombing campaign. PIRA's most potent weapon was, in fact, its own invention, the car-bomb. It was introduced into PIRA's arsenal in early 1972. The capacity of a mobile platform to transfer large bomb loads over a wide area had a devastating impact on the province. 'The strategic aim', of the car-bombings MacStiofain said, 'was to make the government and administration of the occupied North as difficult as possible, simultaneously striking at its colonial infrastructure.'[42] The rationale was to restrict the province's economic base by hitting commercial and business premises to drive away investment and force the British to pay compensation.[43] This would drive up the financial costs of holding Northern Ireland and reinforce the impression of an ungovernable liability and accentuate, in the British public's mind, the relief to be had from a withdrawal.

In tandem with the economic war, the bombings served a number of tactical objectives. The Provisionals believed that the bombing threat could divert the security forces from counter-insurgency operations by tying down large numbers of troops in static positions guarding potential targets. In addition, by 'stretching the British Army to the limits of its resources', the Provisionals felt they could 'keep pressures off the nationalist areas.'[44] By reducing the Army's presence in Catholic areas, the Provisionals could

40. Boyce, 'Water for the Fish', in Alexander and O'Day, *Terrorism in Ireland*, p. 166.
41. Quoted in K. Kelley, *The Longest War* (London, 1982), p. 153.
42. MacStiofain, p. 243.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 243.
44. PSF, *Freedom Struggle by the Provisional IRA* (n.p., n.d. *c.* 1973), p. 34.

hope to enhance their credibility as defenders. In practice, this proposition was untenable. Lieutenant-General Sir Harry Tuzo, the British Army's commanding officer in Northern Ireland, pointed out in late 1971 that the mere fact of PIRA's existence caused the security forces to concentrate their efforts on the Catholic community.[45] At times PIRA's bombings may well have deflected the security forces' attention, but such distractions were always likely to prove temporary. In due course, the security forces were bound to resume their activities in Catholic areas; patrols, house searches, round-ups, interrogations etc.. Some Catholics suspected that the Provisionals were not really aiming to keep away the security forces at all, but more interested, instead, in drawing them into Catholic areas so that PIRA could mount attacks, using the population as a shield, while benefiting politically from the Army's excesses which the Provisionals themselves had partially provoked.[46] There is no direct evidence to suggest that this is what PIRA had intended, though it was a natural consequence of its actions. As the sociologist, Frank Burton, has argued, this problem turned on the definition of what was meant by defence. Since the Provisionals ultimately believed that only in the framework of a united Ireland could Northern Catholics be properly protected, then they may have seen little contradiction in the provocation of the security forces in this manner.[47]

Although the heart of PIRA's strategy was directed at an audience in Great Britain, it was also the case that its campaign was, to an important degree, inner directed towards affecting political and military conditions in Northern Ireland. In this sense, PIRA was able to practise a limited policy of terrorism aimed at demoralising the unionists, in effect, making them more pliable to its demands. By 'terrorism' we refer to the deliberate creation of fear, through the use, or threat of use, of individual acts of

45. *The Irish Times*, 20 Dec. 1971.
46. Burton, pp. 82-83.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 83.

physical violence, for political and military ends. The constant attacks on Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) and the Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR) personnel were an attempt to deter local people from joining the security forces. Between 1970 and 1972, 58 RUC and UDR men had been killed and over 1000 injured.[48] Success in this sphere would have improved tactical conditions for the Provisionals but their campaign, then and since, has had no discernible impact on the level of recruitment into the local security forces. Figures for RUC recruitment show that on average applications for places have been some 11 times over subscribed (in the late 1980s places were 20 times over subscribed).[49] More significantly in this regard, PIRA's violence was also aimed at sustaining a high level of public anxiety among the populace in Northern Ireland in general. Maria McGuire claimed that although it was no part of PIRA's strategy to deliberately cause civilian casualties, the creation of a feeling of terror as a by-product of the bombing campaign was intentional: 'By causing such terror we demonstrated that whatever steps the army took, the Provisionals could continue the military campaign; half a million people in Belfast would be kept wondering where the Provisionals would strike next and would be forced to tell the British to make peace with us.'[50] There is no indication at all whether the fear of bombs had the desired effect of cowering the population into submission. However, the Protestant community as a whole remained surprisingly subdued in the face of PIRA's onslaught. Even the loyalist paramilitaries, like the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), had been relatively inert during the very early 1970s. The Provisionals were in no doubt that their campaign was responsible in large measure for Protestant quiescence, and made no

48. RUC Statistical Information, RUC Information Office (Belfast, 1989).
49. RUC information supplied by letter, 14 June 1990. Yearly statistics on recruitment are published in the *Chief Constable's Annual Report* (Belfast). See also C. Ryder, *RUC: A force Under Fire* (London, 1989), p. 127.
50. McGuire, pp. 34-35.

secret of their contempt for loyalist fighting abilities. According to a senior PIRA spokesman:

> You would get a large number [of Protestants] who would attack a defenceless nationalist community as in August, 1969. But I think only a small minority would fight now. We took on the UVF in June 1970 and we taught them a lesson in hard defensive fighting. You'll notice there has been no sectarian fighting since then.[51]

In other areas, the effects of PIRA's campaign were more easily quantifiable. Inevitably the violence had an impact on the Northern Irish economy. Economic growth in the first half of 1971 was only 1%, down from a projected 10%, while the fear of bombs had depressed inner-city trade by as much as 30%.[52] Even so, the effect on employment appears to have been marginal. From 1966 to 1971 unemployment increased by 2% which was slightly lower than the rise in Great Britain (2.1%) over the same period.[53] There is no doubt that the financial cost to the central exchequer of maintaining the high level of security and economic support was considerable. Up to 1979 the average cost arising directly from the violence was put at £182 million per year while the total annual bill for financial assistance to the province was running at approximately £1 billion.[54] Therefore, along with the general confusion and violence, between 1971 and 1972 there averaged 17 shooting incidents and nearly 4 bombings per day, we can assume that PIRA was successful in attaining its intermediate military goal of creating and sustaining the impression of Northern Ireland as an unfathomable political and economic burden. This was reflected in opinion poll evidence which gave PIRA cause to believe its campaign had been able to convince people that withdrawal was the only realistic option. The Provisionals made much of a *Daily Mail* poll in September 1971 which indicated that over 60% of the British public favoured the withdrawal of the British Army:

51. Quoted in J. MacAnthony, 'Gun Glory', *The Guardian*, 14 Aug. 1971.
52. M. Turner, 'Living With Bombs', *Fortnight*, 1 Oct. 1971.
53. See table in T. O'Hanlon, *The Irish: Portrait of a People* (London, 1976), p. 241.
54. T. Coogan, *The IRA* (London, 1987), p. 471.

> It is refreshing to hear the sweet voice of reason and common sense expressed by the ordinary people after all the inane prattle and inconsequential ramblings of the politicians... The effects [of the military campaign] are becoming apparent on all sides. Economically the Six Counties is tottering. Politically Stormont is about to collapse and now we are seeing the first chink in the enemy's armour.[55]

Towards the end of 1971 these initial political gains convinced the Provisionals that their campaign was dictating the course of events.[56] They were sufficiently buoyed up for *Republican News* to proclaim 1972 'The Year of Victory.'[57] The year was certainly to prove crucial for PIRA. The most significant sign that its strategy was proceeding to plan was the suspension of Stormont on 24 March 1972. The imposition of direct rule from Westminster was a major political success for the Provisionals who claimed full credit for the fall of 'the puppet parliament in Belfast.'[58] MacStiofain maintained, not all that surprisingly, that he had 'yet to meet a single person who ever thought that Stormont fell for any other reason than the armed struggle of the Republican movement.'[59] More objectively, it can be said that PIRA's campaign pushed Stormont over the edge by highlighting its inability to cope with the deteriorating security situation or to respond to the need for substantive political reforms. But the Stormont regime had already been fatally weakened by the civil rights movement back in 1968 and 1969. In the meantime, the Stormont administration, with its own internal divisions, was proving adept at destabilising itself. The best illustration of this was the botched introduction of internment without trial on 9 August 1971, which dealt a great blow to Stormont's credibility. The initial swoop was based on inaccurate and out-dated intelligence and 105 of the 342 arrested had to be released within 48 hours. Most PIRA operatives had been forewarned and had gone into hiding. Only in Derry were the Provisionals

55. 'Bring Our Boys Home', *RN*, 2 Oct. 1971.
56. *The Daily Telegraph*, 11 Oct. 1971.
57. *RN*, 2 Jan. 1972.
58. R. O'Bradaigh, 1972 Ard-Fheis Address, in R. O'Bradaigh, *Our People: Our Future* (Dublin, 1973), p. 24.
59. MacStiofain, p. 241.

hit badly by the arrests. The introduction of internment instantaneously united all shades of Catholic opinion against the authorities. Far from stemming the violence, internment provided PIRA with an enormous propaganda victory which boosted recruitment. In the 4 months preceding internment there had been a combined total of 8 civilian and military deaths. The 4 months after the introduction of internment saw the deaths of 30 soldiers, 11 RUC officers and 73 civilians.[60]

Overall, it would be true to say that PIRA's violence applied the stimulus which opened up the tensions and contradictions that existed between Stormont and Westminster. The British government was placed in an invidious position. It was reluctant to prorogue Stormont due to a general disinclination to become embroiled in the complexity of the province's affairs and also because the dissolution of an elected assembly, no matter its many imperfections, was basically an anti-democratic step. Yet in trying to defend Stormont, the world saw the British government propping up a discredited sectarian regime that did not command any degree of support amongst Northern Ireland's substantial Catholic population.

In no small measure, PIRA's strategy up to early 1972 had proven highly successful. PIRA had skilfully implanted itself within the Catholic community from where it was able to launch a military campaign that turned what had originally been a quest for protection and the redress of social and economic grievances into a far wider political debate concerning, not just the competence of the Stormont regime, but the legitimacy of the Northern state as a whole. This was a major political victory for the Provisionals. PIRA had demonstrated the potency of a campaign comprising of small-scale military actions designed to pressurise a more powerful opponent. On the other hand, the attainment of PIRA's main intermediate objective emphasised the delicate nature of its strategy. PIRA had not 'bombed

60. See Flackes and Elliott, pp. 402-404 and Hamill, p. 65.

down' Stormont. It had been the British who had actually dismantled the Stormont edifice and, to this extent, it was with the British that the political initiative continued to reside. PIRA's military operations had been able to elicit a response which was amenable to its long-term objectives. But this did not mean that PIRA was now in the political driving seat. For the Provisionals to achieve their final goal of a British withdrawal they would have to convert their military position into political influence. This called for the formulation of a coherent political programme and definite negotiating proposals with which tempt the British. To establish a firm bargaining position required close political and military co-ordination and it was in this regard that the real test of PIRA's strategy was yet to come.

The Politics of PIRA's Offensive

In any conflict the tactical efficiency with which military operations are executed will be meaningless unless they form part of a co-ordinated plan to achieve political ends, because the success of a strategy can only be judged with reference to the attainment of the overall political objective. By 1972, few could doubt the technical ability of PIRA to mount limited military engagements against both the security forces and the institutional and economic infrastructure of the Northern Irish state. For PIRA's strategy to be truly effective, though, these engagements had to be converted into the means to fulfil political ends. The problem for the Provisionals was the correlation between the nature of the goal sought and the resources available with which to achieve it.

The objective of the Provisionals' strategy can be described as one of direct control in the sense that it required a complete change in the status of the territory of Northern Ireland through the removal of any kind of

British presence.[61] As has been elucidated in previous chapters, the only way such a change in political control could be guaranteed was through the physical destruction of the resources that Britain was prepared to commit in order to keep Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom. Yet the total strength of the Provisionals in Northern Ireland just after the introduction of internment in August 1971, was estimated at a little over 1000.[62] Opposing them were a regular British Army presence of 14,000 troops, the RUC at 6000 and an expanding UDR with over 8000 members.[63] In this type of scenario, where one belligerent is clearly limited in its capacity to inflict damage on its opponent, the efficacy of its direct control strategy can only be assessed at any point in the conflict by the political effects generated by its military campaign. The physical consequences of the tactical engagements will not be decisive in affecting the outcome of the conflict as it is unlikely they would be able to significantly alter the overall ratio of forces in favour of the inferior belligerent. So, the challenge for PIRA was to exploit what could only be positions of temporary military and psychological advantage for maximum political gain. The logic of PIRA's position meant that if it was to stand any chance of achieving its political objectives, the movement would have to confront Britain, not in the field of battle, but over the negotiating table. Irrespective of the success of its military actions, eventually the Provisionals would have to persuade the British that they were a serious political force with substantive and realistic proposals for the future of Ireland.

The initial problem for the Provisionals was to surmount the traditional republican reluctance to get involved in politics. The nature of the

61. See L. Freedman, 'Terrorism and Strategy', in L. Freedman, *et al*, *Terrorism and International Order* (London, 1986), p. 60.
62. See Institute for the Study of Conflict, 'The Balance of Military Forces', in *The Ulster Debate*, (London, 1972), p. 53.
63. P. Janke, 'Ulster: A Decade of Violence', *Conflict Studies*, No. 108, June, 1979, pp. 18-19. See also Appendix 1 in M. Arthur, *Northern Ireland: Soldiers Talking* (London, 1987), p. 255.

1969/70 split dictated that PIRA was primarily a military organisation with little concern for the political machinations of the Official IRA. In any case, the Provisionals already enjoyed widespread backing from the Catholic community, there seemed little overwhelming reason to draw up a precise political manifesto. Nevertheless, there was general acceptance, even amongst the most hardline elements of PIRA's leadership, that if the movement was to establish a firm negotiating agenda then it would have to clarify its political ideas. According to Maria McGuire's testimony: 'The Military campaign was vital; and we knew as we achieved success after success that the British would have to talk to us. But when MacStiofain came into the Kevin Street office [Dublin HQ of PSF] and announced, "We've got to have a policy", it was for him a change of emphasis indeed.'[64]

The first tangible sign of the Provisionals' intent to give its campaign a political dimension came with the issuing of the *Eire Nua* (New Ireland) programme in June 1971. The programme set out PSF's thoughts on the creation of a federal administration in a post-united Ireland. The plan envisaged an Ulster parliament (*Dail Uladh*) comprising of the original nine counties of the province. The federal solution was PSF's way of trying to soothe Protestant animosity towards Irish unity by guaranteeing them a major influence within a regional assembly.[65] This was supplemented in September 1971 when PIRA announced a five-point plan for the suspension of hostilities; the end to the violence of the British forces, abolition of Stormont, free elections to a new Ulster assembly, the release of political prisoners and compensation to victims of British violence. Given the scale of the demands, and the fact that PIRA's offensive was barely a year old, there was little prospect of the plan being accepted. However, it could be seen as the opening gambit in an implicit bargaining process which was attempting

64. McGuire, pp. 110.
65. 'Dail Uladh - IRA: Step Towards a Political Solution', *AP*, Sept. 1971.

to set a negotiating agenda with the British. The plan was coupled with an explicit threat to intensify the campaign if the British did not comply within four days.[66]

PIRA's next political initiative came on 10 March 1972, with the declaration of a 72-hour truce. This was accompanied by a moderated ceasefire plan which called for the withdrawal of the Army from the streets, an acknowledgement of the right of the Irish people to determine their own future, the abolition of Stormont and an amnesty for political prisoners. This move was seen as a further attempt by PIRA to gain political credibility and to pre-empt the impending British proposals for the province, which were widely expected to include the abolition of Stormont.[67] 'We were by now sure', McGuire said of the 10 March proposals, 'that the British government would be compelled to ask where we stood politically, such was the success of our miliary campaign.'[68] To increase the pressure on the British government, the expiration of the truce was followed by the resumption of widespread bomb attacks all over the province.

Stormont's demise later in March posed the first real problem for PIRA. Abolition had rectified one of the major Catholic grievances. As a result, there was heavy pressure on PIRA from within the Catholic community to call a ceasefire. Many Catholics were tired of the hardships imposed by the conflict. There was also a growing concern at PIRA's increasingly casual regard for civilian casualties.[69] Incidents like the killing of two people in the bombing of the Abercorn restaurant on 4 March, which PIRA has always denied, and the killing of six people in a car bombing in Belfast, were seen as especially reckless.

PIRA ignored the calls for a ceasefire and decided to continue with its

66. See PSF, *Freedom Struggle by the Provisionals*, p. 44.
67. *The Irish Times*, 11 March, 1972.
68. McGuire, p. 100.
69. See *The Observer*, 26 March 1972.

campaign. The reasons for the decision were broadly ideological and strategic. The tradition of the nationalist vanguard never inclined hardliners to take more than a passing interest in popular opinion. For MacStiofain, any peace now, with or without Stormont, would still be peace under colonial rule. It would not end the suffering of the nationalist people. It would merely result in a loss of military momentum and allow the initiative to pass to the constitutional politicians. He scorned the demands for an immediate ceasefire:

> Laying down arms with no guarantee would amount to surrender, leaving Republicans wide open to arrest and wholesale round-ups by the military ...[the] struggle was not to play politics or to grab momentary praise from the media and the middle class. It was to liberate the country and get the British out of it once and for all.[70]

As if to indicate that the much greater goal of British withdrawal was now in sight, as well as to allay Catholic opinion, the Provisionals assured their supporters that they were 'now entering the final phase of the struggle'.[71] MacStiofain was certain that: 'If we could continue to inflict high British causualties and step up the sabotage campaign it would be difficult for them to bear the strain and the drain on their economy, and no government could be prepared to continue indefinitely in such a situation. They were really in no position to sneer at a truce.'[72]

Two months later PIRA's calculations seemed to pay off. PIRA announced that a ceasefire would take effect from 26 June. In response, the Northern Ireland Secretary, William Whitelaw, agreed to meet a PIRA delegation in London. The main medium-term objective of PIRA's military campaign had been achieved. Through a blend of coercive military pressure and limited political manoeuvre, PIRA had been able to lever itself into a position where it had the chance to shape future British policy towards Northern Ireland. As an example of an insurgent strategy aimed at

70. MacStiofain, p. 241. See also p. 258.
71. *AP*, April 1972.
72. MacStiofain, p. 261.

asserting influence over a more powerful adversary, PIRA's conduct had been a of its kind. Anxious to maintain the tacit bargaining process to keep the pressure on the British, MacStiofain ordered the continuation of operations up to the last minute before the ceasefire. MacStiofain concluded that 'Irish Republican resistance had demonstrated to the British, the Unionists, to our own rank and file and to the whole world that after three years in battle against imperialism the movement was as tough a fighting force as ever and was speaking from strength.'[73]

Now that the military instrument had fulfilled its political task it was up to the Provisional delegation to use their political technique to extract the concessions that would help them realise their overall objectives. The meeting with Whitelaw was arranged for 7 July.

The PIRA-Whitelaw Talks

Notwithstanding the impeccable strategic logic and the undoubted operational skill of the military campaign which had placed the Provisionals at the negotiating table, a number of questions about PIRA's strategy still lingered. Was, for instance, PIRA's strategy designed to suit the prevailing political circumstances, or did the circumstances happen to suit its campaign? Did it really take all that much planning to make Northern Ireland appear ungovernable? After all, in the age of world-wide telecommunications violence of all kinds tended to be amplified. A few selectively covered incidents could easily convey the televisual impression of a mass killing ground. Horrible though the suffering was, the violence between 1969 and 1972 still claimed only half the lives lost in road accidents in the province over the same period.[74] And we have already suggested that Stormont, for all its bastion-like facade, was really an anachronism waiting for its own downfall.

73. *Ibid.*, p. 269.
74. Deaths through violence, 1969-72: 679. Deaths through road accidents, 1969-72: 1205. Source: RUC Statistics.

Therefore, the collapse of the unionist power structure cannot be regarded as having provided the supreme test of PIRA's strategy. Needless to say, PIRA's campaign was certainly not inconsequential. No government agrees lightly to treat with those it has branded terrorists. However, the point is, that by placing themselves within the tradition of militant republicanism, the Provisionals were conditioned to respond to the *status quo* in a pre-determined way. As Bishop and Mallie have argued, by initiating their offensive the Provisionals 'were simply resuming hostilities against anyone in the Queen's uniform in a war they had never declared over.'[75] As evinced by all the disastrous campaigns since the end of the Anglo-Irish war, careful evaluation of the utility of armed force has just not been an historical pre-requisite for IRA action.

Nonetheless, whatever doubts over the quality of PIRA's political and military analysis, the talks with Whitelaw would provide an ideal opportunity for the Provisionals to show how far their strategic thinking had advanced. To reach the final goal of a British disengagement would require a high degree of political sophistication and negotiating skill. For it would be in the political arena that the real test of PIRA's abilities would lie.

What was to make negotiations with the Provisionals problematical was the unaccommodating nature of republican ideology. We have noted throughout this study that this belief manifests itself in the absolute demand for the realisation of an independent, united republic. As the Provisionals saw it, any compromise would be a betrayal, as MacStiofain declared in April 1971: 'concessions be damned we want our freedom.'[76]

The uncompromising commitment to the republican ideal meant that the Provisionals, like their predecessors who resisted the Anglo-Irish Treaty, held a different conception of the term 'negotiation' from the British.

75. Bishop and Mallie, p. 132.
76. Quoted in R. Fisk, 'Both IRA Wings Say: "We Fight On"', *The Times*, 3 April 1972.

Although the Provisionals may have had a basic grasp of the notion of bargaining through military pressure, it is clear that they had little comprehension of political bargaining. To them, negotiation was not about the lengthy process of teasing out common ground through proposal, counter-proposal, tactical concessions and so on. As demonstrated by the controversy of the 1921 Treaty, the concept of negotiation was, in many respects, alien to the republican tradition. How could there be any common-ground with the never failing source of all Ireland's political evils? Instead, 'negotiation' was about demand, threat and coercion - in other words, a complete British surrender. This image of the political process was evident in the months preceding the truce. In April 1972, *Republican News* argued: 'It is the British, not we, who still refuse to negotiate. We have made very few, very simple and very reasonable demands, the granting of which would lead to an immediate truce.'[77] Yet these 'reasonable demands' referred to PIRA's unconditional terms as contained in the plan announced during the 72 hour truce on 10 March, namely, a wholesale British withdrawal. Likewise, when the Provisionals put forward their truce proposals of June 1972 they demanded that the meeting with Whitelaw should take place soon after the implementation of the truce: 'in order to discuss *and secure acceptance of the IRA peace plan* [author's italics] viz: (i) A declaration acknowledging the right of the Irish people to self-determination; (ii) A commitment to withdraw from Ireland by a specific date; (iii) A general amnesty for all political prisoners in Britain and Ireland.'[78] Being so bold as to pre-judge the outcome of the talks, suggests the Provisionals believed that simply because Whitelaw had agreed to a meeting Britain was willing to acquiesce to their basic demands. When MacStiofain put these demands to Whitelaw he made it plain that the Provisionals were not prepared to compromise on the substance

77. 'No Truce on these Terms', *RN*, Easter Sunday, 1972.
78. PSF, *Freedom Struggle by the Provisionals*, p. 67.

of their plan. They were willing only to discuss issues such as the announcement of further meetings and the timing of a British withdrawal.[79]

Having presented their terms, the Provisionals were unimpressed by Whitelaw's equivocal attitude. Whitelaw was not looking for a way to withdraw from Northern Ireland. Whitelaw himself claims he was persuaded that a refusal to meet PIRA during the ceasefire might have left the Provisionals with a propaganda victory. If the talks failed, then at least he could justify an increase in security measures, particularly to those in the Catholic community like the SDLP, who had been pressing him to meet PIRA so that no opportunity for ending the violence would be missed.[80] The pretension of the Provisionals' demands was obvious since they plainly had no idea of the legal constraints under which the British were compelled to operate. For example, PIRA expected the British government to brush aside the constitutional obligations under the Ireland Act of 1949 which guaranteed the position of Northern Ireland within the UK with the consent of the population. In addition, PIRA's proposals appeared to assume that the British government could override the sovereignty of the Republic of Ireland. It was quite erroneous to think that the British could agree off-the-cuff to Irish unity, which would have entailed the disbandment of the Southern state, or to the release of political prisoners in Irish jails. The British simply had no legal authority in either matter. As Whitelaw recalls dismissively: 'The meeting was a non-event. The IRA leaders simply made impossible demands which I told them the British Government would never concede. They were in fact still in a mood of defiance and determination to carry on until their absurd ultimatums were met.'[81]

What is more, the talks seemed to reveal that the Provisionals still had only the most rudimentary understanding of the relationship between

79. MacStiofain, pp. 281-283.
80. W. Whitelaw, *The Whitelaw Memoirs* (London, 1989), pp. 99-100.
81. *Ibid.*, p. 100.

politics and violence. In particular, they appeared unaffected by any notion that their own restricted military potential might have some impact on their ability to attain their extensive political demands. The inconsistency in PIRA's thinking was exhibited in a speech by Joe Cahill in 1971 in which he initially concurred with the view expressed by Lt. Gen. Tuzo that the conflict would eventually be settled through a political solution, rather than any outright military victory by either side, but went onto say:

> If there is to be a political settlement in Ireland, there must never be another sell-out. We must ensure that the politicians who have betrayed the cause of Ireland for the past 50 years are not allowed to sit on any conference table. It is our duty to ensure that Republicanism is a felt force and that when a settlement is arrived at, that the last vestige of British Imperialism is driven from our shores.[82]

By arguing that the only acceptable terms for a political settlement could be those that granted PIRA exclusive negotiating rights, and by seeking the total extirpation of British influence, the Provisionals were, in effect, demanding all those things which could only be obtained as a function of military victory - a probability that they had already discounted.

The jumbled signals put out by PIRA's leaders suggested that while they appreciated that they could never physically eliminate Britain's military capabilities, they could still, somehow, induce the British to capitulate. In actuality, what these signals added up to was customary republican zero-sum thinking, which precluded the possibility of a settlement based on mutual compromise and blinded the movement to the realities of the political and military circumstances. Martin McGuinness, one of the PIRA delegates to the talks, later claimed: 'I learned in two hours what Irish politicians still haven't learned: that the British don't give easily.'[83] Yet a brief reconnoitre of the prevailing political situation would have shown that the British had little spellbinding reason to give anything at all. The

82. J. Cahill, Bodenstown Speech, *AP*, July 1971.
83. Quoted in K. McCool, 'Valuable Lesson in British Duplicity', *AP/RN*, 6 Aug. 1987.

conflict in Northern Ireland was unpopular in Great Britain but it was sufficiently removed from most people's lives for any discontent to be translated into a significant political issue in mainstream British politics. Also, British politicians made it clear that the situation, in the words of Reginald Maudling the Home Secretary, could be tolerated so long as the violence could be held at 'an acceptable level'.[84] So far as the British Army's attrition rate was concerned, MacStiofain recounted that British officials let it be known to the PIRA delegates that the level of casualties was not especially worrisome.[85]

PIRA's strategic position raised the question about how far a strategy of low intensity attritional warfare could be employed in pursuit of designated ends? Was there a time to recognise the limits of the military instrument and pursue the ends through other, non-violent, means? The trouble was that the persistence of ideological absolutism within the movement's thinking inhibited any serious understanding of these sorts of questions. The essence of the Provisionals postion was summed up in an article in *An Phoblacht* in 1970, entitled 'The Republican Ethic'. It stated that the movement's primary concern should not be with politics, which was described as the 'the science of the possible', but with the preservation of the purity of republican principles: 'The truth, the entire truth: that is what we mean by a republican ethic, a republican code. As long as republicanism lives, there will be people prepared to live by that code and, if necessary, to die in its defence. So long will the nation survive.'[86] This tract exemplified the nature of the internal dynamic contained within republican ideology, which dictated that any solution which failed to live up to the absolute truth of the 'republican code' would be a violation of the movement's birthright. Therefore, the fate of the June 1972 talks were more or less

84. Quoted in Bowyer Bell, *The Secret Army*, p. 384.
85. MacStiofain, p. 285.
86. D. Breatnach, 'The Republican Ethic', *AP*, July 1970.

pre-ordained, as McGuinness explained:

> The only interest that we had in going to meet Whitelaw wasn't to talk about side issues, this element or that element. Our aim was - and it would be a failure if we didn't get it - to secure a binding agreement from the British declaring their intention to leave Ireland at some date in the future. That was the only interest. The attitude of republicans to the ceasefire was that it was going to be short-term. At the meeting we were going to identify very quickly whether or not we were being played along. We had a single-minded approach to it. If the British weren't going to come up with a declaration of intent to withdraw, then the truce was over.[87]

The resumption of PIRA's campaign took place two days after the talks on 9 July after PIRA accused the British Army of contravening the truce following a relatively minor conflagration on the Lenadoon housing estate in West Belfast.[88] Although the timing of the breakdown was not altogether to the Provisional leadership's liking, it was, given the basic nature of PIRA's ideological perspective, an inevitable eventuality.

It was the unyielding character of republican maxims that were responsible for the incoherence of PIRA's strategic thought. The main damage this caused to the Provisionals prospects was that the movement was rendered incapable of exploiting the potential political benefits that its military campaign had created. PIRA's willingness to continue the fight for the absolute republican ideal, regardless of whether the circumstances were propitious for its attainment, was both a symptom and a cause of what was perhaps the most fundamental problem which afflicted, not just the strategy of the Provisionals, but those of generations of physical force nationalists before it as well - the inability to come to terms with the reality of British power. PIRA's subsequent actions in the days ahead would prove the point.

87. Quoted in McCool, 'Valuable Lesson in British Duplicity'.
88. 'Provisionals Call Off Ceasefire After Army Clash in Belfast', *The Times* 10 July 1972.

Unlimited Ideology in Limited War - The Fallacy of Military Escalation

Following the breakdown of the truce, PIRA decided to escalate its campaign. MacStiofain declared that the renewed offensive would be 'of the utmost ferocity and ruthlessness.'[89] Only 3 days after the resumption of hostilities PIRA actions had claimed the lives of 8 soldiers and a policeman. By the end of July the monthly death toll had reached 95, the highest monthly figure recorded in the conflict. PIRA believed that while the British may have been willing to reach an agreement, they had begun backsliding due to growing loyalist unrest. Protestants were worried and resentful at the truce. Even more so when news broke of PIRA's meeting with Whitelaw. The main loyalist paramilitary organisation, the Ulster Defence Association (UDA), took to the streets and put up its own barricades to match the 'no-go' areas controlled by PIRA in nationalist districts of Belfast and Derry. Senior UDA leaders were quoted as saying they would now 'take steps to eliminate the gunmen.'[90] The random assassination of Catholics increased. The reasoning behind the renewed offensive, MacStiofain said was:

> ...to re-establish a strong IRA presence throughout the North. This pulled the attention of the British back from the Unionist blackmail move with the UDA, reminding them that the IRA remained the hard central factor in the whole Northern situation. The feeling was that if the offensive could be maintained in sufficient strength it could lead to renewed contact regarding a solution...[91]

'On Friday, July 21', MacStiofain explained, 'a concerted sabotage offensive was carried out'. The Provisionals planted 22 bombs in Belfast city centre. All were timed to explode in the space of an hour. The purpose was to 'impose a sudden and severe load on the British-Unionist system'.[92] In all, nine people were killed in the explosions (initial reports put the figure at 11 due to the difficulty of counting the shattered remains of bodies). The atmosphere in the city that afternoon was

89. Quoted in *The Irish Press*, 9 July 1972.
90. 'Iam: UDA Puts Loyalists on War Footing', *The Guardian*, 11 July 1972.
91. MacStiofain, p. 294.
92. *Ibid.*, p. 295.

described in press reports: 'It was impossible for anyone to feel perfectly safe. As each bomb exploded there were cries of terror from people who thought they had found sanctury, but were in fact just as exposed as before.'[93] Public opinion was outraged. One woman at the scene said: 'This is the end. Mr. Whitelaw should take his coat off and mop up the blood.'[94] 'Bloody Friday', as it became known, was a turning point for PIRA's strategy. Whitelaw had been planning an Army operation to regain control of the 'no-go' areas since the breakdown of the ceasefire. 'Bloody Friday' provided the final impetus. Hitherto, the 'no-go' areas had been tolerated for fear that any move would alienate Catholic opinion at a sensitive time when their support was crucial to sustain any new political initiative.[95]

On 31 July, under the code name of 'Operation Motorman', the British Army reoccupied the areas of the Creggan and Bogside known as 'Free Derry' and the barricaded districts of Belfast. There was little resistance. The Provisionals decided not to try to take on the Army during the operation which involved thousands of troops. Motorman represented a decisive blow against PIRA. Not only did the Provisionals lose the propaganda value of the 'no-go' areas, which often took on the appearance of PIRA mini-states, but, more importantly, the movement's operational capacity was severely reduced. These areas were a considerable military asset. They provided the Provisionals with safe havens from where they could mount operations and remain effectively immune from the security forces. The 'no-go' districts were also the crucible of a great deal of low level violence; casual shootings, stonings, riots and so on, which did much to keep the city areas in a state of constant turmoil. Motorman also broke up the hard core of

93. S. Winchester and S. Hoggart, '11 Dead, 100 Hurt in Hour of Bombs', *The Guardian*, 22 July 1972.
94. Quoted in *The Daily Telegraph*, 22 July 1972.
95. Hamill, pp. 107-113.

PIRA operatives in Belfast and Derry, most of whom were dispersed into the countryside over the border. The rate of attacks fell sharply. In comparison with the 3 week periods before and after Motorman, the statistics show a decline in explosions from 180 to 73, shooting incidents declined from 2595 to 380 and the number of soldiers killed fell from 18 to 11.[96] Thereafter, the rate of violence continued on a downward curve for the next ten years.

The loss of military momentum devastated the military bargaining strategy that the Provisionals had striven to maintain. A high level of military activity had been the key to maximise the psychological pressure on the British to respond to the violence in a manner which PIRA could hope to gain politically. From a strictly theoretical standpoint, and exercising hindsight, PIRA's achievements may have been greater if it had called a halt to its campaign in the summer of 1972 and had either allowed PSF to emerge as a legitimate political party (at the time PSF was little more than a nominal political front group for PIRA) or forged alliances with existing constitutional nationalist parties, like the SDLP. Being at the height of their prestige and able to claim credit for the fall of the old sectarian order at Stormont, the Provisionals could have become a major political force with considerable influence over British policy. After 'Bloody Friday', the Provisionals were politically untouchable. There was no way back to the negotiating process. Whitelaw publicly vowed that he would never again meet with the Provisionals and promised to toughen up security measures by increasing troop levels and expanding the UDR and police.[97] Primarily though, 'Bloody Friday' had given the British Army the pretext it needed to remove the 'no-go' areas - perhaps the most significant military factor which had made PIRA a potent threat. Reflecting on the period, Whitelaw

96. P. Chippindale, 'Motorman's Slow Drive', *The Guardian*, 26 Aug. 1972.
97. 'Whitelaw: I Won't Meet IRA Again', *The Sunday Times*, 23 July 1972.

believes that in a political sense he was 'extremely fortunate' over the ceasefire episode:

> If as a result of deciding in favour of a secret exploratory meeting, I had become involved in further discussions with IRA leaders, I would eventually have landed myself in great difficulties. Clearly, those ought to have been the IRA tactics. As it turned out, by returning to violence almost at once, they presented me with a considerable advantage. They proved that they were intransigent and that it was the British Government who really wanted an end to violence.[98]

By refusing to play the kind of diplomatic game to which Whitelaw was alluding, that is, using the meeting with him to manoeuvre the British into substantive negotiations, the Provisionals undid much of the potential advantage created by their military efforts. Above all, by refusing to accept limited goals in a limited war scenario, the Provisionals had torpedoed their own strategy, thus illustrating a clear example of over-escalation in a low intensity conflict.

It was mentioned in the introduction that war in the abstract will have a tendency to escalate towards a theoretical absolute because each side will continually seek to raise the tempo of the war in order to force its adversary's defeat. For small insurgent groups, like PIRA, which seek to attain their goals through the exercise of coercive psychological pressure, as opposed to the destruction of enemy forces, the temptation to escalate is going to be equally acute because, by its very nature, psychological pressure is difficult to quantify. The insurgent will be unable to gauge what level of coercion will induce the enemy to concede to its terms. If the enemy refuses to yield, the inclination to increase the scale of military activity to secure enemy compliance will be considerable. It is clear from MacStiofain's account that this was how PIRA viewed the renewal of its offensive after the collapse of the truce. The intensification of the campaign was intended to compel the British to reopen negotiations in the belief that one final push would assure victory.

98. Whitelaw, p. 101.

In every sense, these sorts of low intensity coercive strategies can be described as a war of wills fought out on a psychological battlefield where the outcome will be determined, not by who physically prevails over who, but by the resilience of stronger side to withstand the mental knocks inflicted by a protracted campaign of guerrilla attacks. PIRA could have learnt from the history of the Irish civil war that the utility of this type of insurgent warfare will invariably rest on a degree of restraint practised by the more powerful combatant, because, in the end, it will always have the power to deny the psycho-military arena where these strategies can be effective. If the enemy wants to conceive a conflict scenario purely in terms of brute military force, then there is nothing an insurgent can really do about it. So, if an insurgent escalates its military campaign beyond a certain threshold of enemy tolerance, then the enemy's perception of the danger to its own security may outweigh considerations of self-restraint. This may bring forth an enemy counter-escalation which seeks either to recontain or extinguish the insurgent threat.[99]

Most Provisionals recognised that the military odds were heavily in favour of the British. Myles Shevlin, a member of the PIRA delegation that met Whitelaw, admitted: 'They [the Provisionals] can, of course, be beaten. If the British Army puts the boot in they could be flattened. But will they do it?'[100] PIRA's strategy was premised on the belief that the British would restrict the full employment of their military resources because, in the long run, the aim of holding Northern Ireland within the UK would not be considered worth defending. As Shevlin, again, put it:

> But to me its the mentality of the thing that's incomprehensible. A people that would put up with this sort of thing night after night. Knowing that there were four British soldiers killed last night - all of whom, I'm sure, if you met on your local darts team, would be 'the boys'.

99. See W. Laqueur, 'Terrorism - A Balance Sheet', in W. Laqueur (ed.), *The Terrorism Reader* (Philadelphia, 1977), pp. 264-265.
100. Quoted in G. McKnight, *The Mind of the Terrorist* (London, 1974), p. 74.

> What sort of people will accept that? And for a useless cause? That's my answer to 'is it worth it?' Is it worth it to them - the British?'[101]

So if it was believed that the British people would not consent to a full-scale commitment to a 'useless cause', then the Provisionals could assume that an escalation in their military actions would increase the desire for a withdrawal from Northern Ireland, rather than provoke a counter-strike. In this regard, the Provisionals seriously misinterpreted official British perceptions of the conflict. The British government ultimately saw PIRA as an anti-democratic challenge to a freely consenting part of the realm. The escalation of PIRA's campaign merely convinced the British that the Provisionals constituted a sufficient threat to warrant the physical denial of certain operational assets which, until Motorman, it had enjoyed without hindrance. This illustrates the point that it is of critical importance for an insurgent to take account of its adversary's position. It will be necessary to understand the sorts of pressures that might limit the enemy's capacity for concession, and to gain an estimation of how the enemy will react to an increase in military activity. These issues need to be addressed so that the insurgent can build up a realistic picture of its own strategic position relative to that of its opponent. Only through an appreciation of the weaknesses of its own strategy can the insurgent truly define what will constitute a position of political advantage and begin to identify the areas of opportunity that it will be able to exploit. Above all, it requires an understanding that an insurgent's military/political strength is likely to reflect a relative, not an absolute, position at any particular point in time, and that simply upping the *ante* may prove counter-productive. This may mean that the insurgent will have to accept more limited political goals commensurate with its military potential and pursue any further objectives

101. *Ibid.*, p. 75.

through other, non-violent, means.'[102]

There is little evidence, notably in MacStiofain's memoirs, to suggest that the Provisionals gave any serious thought as to how the British might react to the escalation of their campaign following the collapse of the truce. We can infer that the Provisional IRA fell victim to the escalation fallacy in limited war due to an inaccurate assessment of the dimensions of the conflict in which it was fighting. This caused it to ignore the relationship between the psychological and physical elements in war and, consequently, to over-estimate the power of its own strategy *vis-a-vis* a militarily superior opponent. But why did such a fundamental misjudgement occur? More intriguingly, why did the Provisionals choose to persist with their campaign even though, after 'Bloody Friday' and Motorman, it had lost its premier negotiating opportunity? Surely, it must have been obvious to the Provisionals that, with the declining impetus of their campaign, it would be virtually impossible to regain the political initiative? The explanation that emerges reveals a darker side to PIRA's internal machinations regarding the military instrument which were seemingly untouched by any real strategic rationale.

PIRA's Military Recidivism - Maria McGuire versus Sean MacStiofain

One indirect consequence of the carnage of the Summer of 1972, was that it led to the revelations of Maria McGuire. She had been a member of the movement (probably of PSF) had become a confidant of a number of Army Council members. She left the movement in disgust after the 'Bloody Friday' episode. The recollections of her experiences, first in a series of newspaper articles in September 1972 and later in her book, *To Take Arms*, published in the following year, threw light onto the debates within the

102.See J. Garnett, 'Limited War', in J. Baylis, *et al*, *Contemporary Strategy*, pp. 125-126.

leadership over strategic policy. Her memoirs also provide a useful foil to MacStiofain's autobiography which appeared in 1975. Together, they constitute the only detailed accounts we have of the movement's thinking during this period, or any other period for that matter.

The crux of McGuire's testimony, so far as it dealt with strategically related matters, was that the main issue of contention within the leadership was the extent to which the armed struggle could continue to be exploited for political benefit. In other words, at what point should the Army Council accept that it had secured the maximum advantage from the military campaign? McGuire says that the argument was split two ways, between hawks and doves. The dovish faction, led by Ruairi O'Bradaigh and Daithi O'Conaill, with whom McGuire most sympathised, argued that armed force should be complemented by a strong political campaign. This faction, McGuire said, 'saw that ultimately the struggle would have to be translated into political terms, and that how successfully to do this depended on the size of the movement they built up and the basis for unity it had.'[103] Set against such a course were those like MacStiofain, the Chief of Staff, and the commander of the Belfast Brigade, Seamus Twomey, who conceived the struggle almost wholly in military terms.

The first outward sign of tension between the two factions came after the fall of Stormont when O'Bradaigh publicly hinted that the movement might be prepared to call a truce.'[104] Any such thought, though, was immediatately quashed by MacStiofain who quickly declared that the military campaign would go on.'[105] McGuire paints a pallid portrait of MacStiofain: an imperious, self-obsessed, politically inarticulate power-seeker, virulently anti-Protestant and constantly mistrustful of the politicos around him, especially

103.McGuire, p. 73.
104.See D. Coyle, 'Provisional IRA Hints at Modified Truce Conditions', *The Financial Times*, 5 April 1972.
105.McGuire, pp. 104-105.

O'Conaill who he feared was out to replace him as Chief of Staff.[106] As it was, having subsequently fought his way to a meeting with Whitelaw, MacStiofain could feel vindicated by his decision in April 1972 not to bow to his political doves. However, once at the negotiating table, the Provisionals were quite literally flummoxed when Whitelaw was not tempted to submit to their demands. What the July ceasefire revealed, was that once the fighting stopped, the Provisionals lost any kind of power to control events. Without a solid political machine capable of exploiting the opportunities opened up by a period of peace, PIRA found itself unable to extract even the most modest political advantage from its military efforts. Instead, it had to watch as other parties like the SDLP rushed in to fill the political void. After the debacle of the meeting with Whitelaw, the Provisionals were left to drift around rather meaninglessly in the wake of their own political emptiness.

The key players in the aftermath of the Whitelaw talks were the Belfast Provisionals under Twomey. For them, even agreeing to the July truce was a bit of a wrench. They were anxious not to lose military momentum and regarded truces with suspicion, especially since the unilateral ceasefire of September 1971 had given the security forces an opportunity to arrest PIRA activists.[107] More fundamentally, most of the Belfast members had joined in the whirlwind years of 1969 and 1970 when the emphasis had been on building up a Catholic defence force. Consequently, the level of political refinement amongst the grass roots was low, as one member remarked: 'Volunteers were reacting to their hatred of the Brits and the RUC and the feeling that they stood between us and a united Ireland. We never thought of politics.'[108] In deciding what should be done after the Whitelaw meeting,

106.M. McGuire, 'I Accuse Sean MacStiofain', *The Observer*, 3 Sept. 1972.
107.See S. Winchester, 'Belfast Provisionals Want No Truck with a Truce', *The Guardian*, 20 July 1972.
108.Quoted in Bishop and Mallie, p. 152.

McGuire says that the 'poverty of thought within the Belfast command', largely dicated the future course of events:

> All along they believed - as I had - that by terrorising the civilian population you increased their desire for peace and blackmailed the British government into negotiating. But now it seemed Belfast could not deviate from its course. A political judgement was needed which would determine the nature of the Provisionals' selective response; but all the Provisionals knew was to bomb.'[109]

McGuire also alleges that MacStiofain himself was getting agitated at the continuation of the truce because the longer it went on, so he feared the more politically minded elements would gain the upper hand in the Army Council.'[110] The breakdown of the truce gave him the chance to reassert his authority by throwing his weight behind the Belfast Brigade and the reopening of hostilities. This was one of the main reasons McGuire claims she lost heart with the Provisionals, in her words: 'I saw the power play itself was having a decisive effect on the campaign as MacStiofain sought to confirm his position by using those very methods of which his rivals disapproved.'[111]

So, there were a multitude of forces that caused the Provisionals to resume their offensive; ideological pressure which prevented the bulk of the movement from entertaining compromise, MacStiofain's internal power-struggle against O'Conaill and O'Bradaigh, the ebbing away of the political initiative to the SDLP and the UDA,'[112] but above all, the simple fact that without the armed struggle, the Provisionals were deprived of any purpose in life. Denied the opportunity to practise violence, the movement looked like disintegrating or being totally eclipsed as any kind of political force. Maria McGuire summed up the near-pathetic desperation of the Provisionals' dilemma: 'With the end of the truce we were almost relieved to be getting back to what we understood: but we also knew that the breakdown of the truce was

109.McGuire, *To Take Arms*, p. 145.
110.*Ibid.*, p. 128.
111.*Ibid.*, p. 147.
112.See M. Holland, 'Why IRA Broke the Truce', *The Observer*, 16 July 1972.

likely to be tragic for all of us.'[113]

All this, made the return to the military offensive far more disquieting. 'Bloody Friday' was only the worst in a line of atrocities in the following six weeks after the breakdown of the truce, as PIRA gave full vent to its fury. Some 25 civilians were killed, mostly by crossfire in gun battles with troops. There was also a renewed car-bombing campaign which devastated town centres all over the province. In one car bomb attack on the village of Claudy, Co. Londonderry, on 31 July, 8 people were killed. Even in the months after Operation Motorman, when it was clear that PIRA's political fortunes were receding, MacStiofain was still indulging in loud, threatening histrionics. 'Let it be placed on record', he said, 'that the Army Council is determined to continue the armed struggle until total victory, regardless of the cost to ourselves or others, [and] that there will not be another truce until our demands have been met'.'[114]

There appeared little real strategic reasoning behind all the havoc. Even if the resumption of the military campaign was just a rash piece of escalation rather than undertaken to satiate internal organisational pressures, there was little it could have achieved, certainly nothing on the grandiose scale MacStiofain still envisaged. The fact remained that PIRA had blown its best political opportunity. The resumption could only have had a most marginal impact on PIRA's overall bargaining position. In any case, the British government, which had already taken a political gamble by meeting the Provisionals, were in no mood to be led back into direct negotiations. The natural conclusion we come to, is that PIRA was simply out of control, as McGuire commented when the movement exploded back onto the military scene: 'Soon we were becoming prisoners of a new situation. We were being carried along by a series of senseless killings that only MacStiofain

113.McGuire, 'I Accuse Sean MacStiofain'.
114.'Sean MacStiofain Reads Message from Provisional Government', *RN*, 10 Nov. 1972

and Twomey could stop: but they had no idea what else to do."[115] Years later, one Provisional confessed that he was still at a loss to explain the psychosis which gripped the movement in those few months in 1972: 'It just seemed that something snapped. There was death everywhere in the North in those days. I guess it just rubbed off on the lads."[116]

By the end of the summer of 1972, PIRA could barely be described as a coherent political organisation with clearly attainable goals based on the cultivation of popular support and possessed of the flexibility of means and outlook to advance progressively towards its objectives in measured steps. The level of tactical skill it had exhibited was indisputable, and the thinking governing how these small military engagements could be manipulated to entice the British into a negotiating position, was initially sound. Yet, due to a powerful mixture of ideological pressure to resist compromise and unerring reliance, not to say dependence, on armed force, the Provisionals, or at least those who held sway like MacStiofain and his cohorts, were unable to recognise that their expansive objectives could not be achieved by military means alone. The outcome was that PIRA was psychologically unequipped to convert its military campaign into any kind of political currency. Instead, the movement slipped back into a form of violent recidivism which merely concentrated on the narrow search to preserve the military modality of its struggle, regardless of how its ability to achieve its objectives was affected. Overall, the unpoliticised nature of the Provisionals left the movement incapable of observing restraints on the use of force and, therefore, prone to ill-considered acts of escalation. One newspaper article of mid-1972 encapsulated the fundamental character of PIRA's strategic pre-disposition: 'too few ideas chasing too many guns."[117]

115.McGuire, 'I Accuse Sean MacStiofain'.
116.Quoted in Kelley, p. 186.
117.I. Rowan and G. Kemp, 'Why Bombing Goes On', *The Sunday Telegraph* 2 April 1972.

CHAPTER 5

THE EROSION OF PROVISIONAL IRA STRATEGY, 1972-1977

Despite the setbacks during the summer of 1972, PIRA still looked a formidable organisation. The continuing shock and destabilisation generated by PIRA's violence over the preceding two years still left it in a position to influence the political atmosphere in Northern Ireland. Over the longer term, however, PIRA's decision to persist with its campaign was to prove catastrophic for the organisation. By 1976 PIRA had exhausted its military options, brought to the brink of defeat, not just by the technical improvements in the efficiency of the security forces, but by the faulty assumptions of its own strategy.

This chapter will explore the reasons for the descent of PIRA's strategy from the high point of 1972 to the ruination of 1976 and 1977. During this period the Northern Irish conflict was made up of three distinct, but over-lapping, stages: the emergence of the Protestant paramilitaries and the outbreak of a bitter sectarian war; a bombing campaign launched against the British mainland; and a prolonged ceasefire between PIRA and the British authorities beginning in February 1975. By examining PIRA's conduct in each of these stages it is possible to flesh out in detail the specific problems which afflicted PIRA's campaign. This analysis will seek to demonstrate how PIRA's violence was to become more overtly terroristic in nature and increasingly regressive in relation to its stated objectives. These problems, which were first evident in the summer of 1972, became more exposed over time. Although PIRA was seen to falter in this period, all that it was doing was encountering the contradictions which had been inherent in its military thinking since the beginning of its offensive in 1970.

The Provisionals' Dilemma in the Sectarian War

If there was one key phase in the conflict which destroyed much of the credibility of PIRA's strategy it was the sectarian war which gripped Northern Ireland for most of the mid-1970s. From the Spring of 1972 onwards, the rise in the murder of Catholic civilians marked the beginning of the much talked about Protestant backlash. The backlash was the product of fear and despair at what Protestants saw as PIRA's relentless assault on their people, towns, businesses and way of life. The height of loyalist disillusionment was reached in mid-1972 following the imposition of direct rule and later the British government's truce with the Provisionals. Tommy Herron of the UDA explained the sense of frustration:

> Remember, we waited three and a half years. All that time we just didn't believe the security forces would let us down - would leave us so exposed. But when they started, literally sheltering them and harbouring them in the ghetto areas... and at the same time arranged a ceasefire ...I think that was the point that broke the back of some and put heart into others... Don't forget we didn't ask for the violence. The mistake the loyalist population made was to show too much restraint and compassion in the beginning. It was taken for apathy and cowardice... From now on, we'll do whatever's necessary.[1]

In 1972 loyalists were responsible for 102 deaths, mainly through shootings and bombings. By 1977, total loyalist killings would reach 531.[2] The two main agencies behind the backlash were the UDA's military wing, the Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF) and the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF). From the outset, the loyalist paramilitaries tended to regard all Catholics as potential rebels.[3] Consequently, most of the loyalists' victims were Catholics who had nothing to do with the republican movement. The intention of the killings was to choke-off support for the Provisionals by terrorising the nationalist population.[4] The killings did generate great fear and

1. Quoted in McKnight, *The Mind of the Terrorist*, p. 68.
2. *Irish Information Agenda*, p. 2 of Table B1vi.
3. See Guelke, *Northern Ireland: The International Perspective*, p. 64.
4. For a survey of loyalist paramilitary strategies see A. Aughey, 'Sectarian Conflict, 1972-1977', in K. Jeffery (ed.), *The Divided Province* (London, 1987), pp. 80-85.

anxiety within the Catholic community. Martin Dillon and Denis Lehane, who carried out the most intensive study of the early years of the sectarian war, have suggested that the 'profound sense of shock' in the Catholic community resulted from 'the change in a postion where Catholics had been led to believe they were "winning" to one where their vulnerability had become apparent. The Catholics had been vulnerable all of the time, but while the initiative was held by, and all the running made by, Catholic groups, many Catholics failed to realise this.'[5]

Whether the Protestant paramilitaries had planned it or not, their campaign of sectarian attacks challenged the whole basis of PIRA's strategic thought. The Provisionals were placed in a dilemma. The killings were undermining PIRA's claim to be the defenders of the Catholic population. If PIRA failed to react to stop the attacks it risked losing much of its credibility amongst nationalists. The Catholics, desperate for protection, might be driven to the British side. Realistically, all PIRA could do was to retaliate equally randomly against Protestants. Yet to respond in kind would confute the republican principle of non-sectarianism, which the movement had sought to observe since the days of Tone. The Provisionals believed that beneath the artificially induced veil of sectarianism the Protestants were just as Irish as the Catholics.[6] The notion that the Protestants could be reconciled to the Irish nation caused the Provisionals to take a relaxed attitude to future loyalist intentions. A typical view was expressed in one Provisional publication: 'If the average Protestant knew that Britain was withdrawing on a certain date and if such a withdrawal would cause him no financial loss (through social services etc.) and no loss of civil liberties, he would not strenuously object to some form of united or

5. M. Dillon and D. Lehane, *Political Murder in Northern Ireland* (London, 1973), p. 101.
6. See S. Loughran, 'The Working Class of the Falls and Shankill Are All Irish', *RN*, 23 Feb. 1973.

federally united Ireland.'[7] In consequence, when the murders of Catholics reached a more worrying scale, the Provisionals found it incomprehensible why any Protestant 'would want to murder their fellow Ulstermen at this stage of the conflict?'[8] Instead, the killings were ascribed to British Army death squads:

> The Brits then took the only course they know. They had to attempt to lower, the by now sky-high morale of the people. They had to try and discredit the freedom fighters and protectors of the people. They did this, not by trying to 'flush' out the IRA nor by 'hot pursuit', but by the lowest of Black and Tan terror tactics. After making sure that a couple of areas, were 'cleared' of any form of protection, they sent in, their mobile murder squads. With orders, not just to shoot anyone, but instead, to shoot, the youngest people that they could find, and so strike fear into the hearts of the fathers and mothers in all areas.[9]

According to Dillon and Lehane's investigations, only 2 of the 200 deaths they examined could be blamed on the Army.[10] The Army's role in the assassinations, they concluded, was 'statistically insignificant.'[11]

Protestants remained sceptical of PIRA's non-sectarian incantations. In their view, PIRA's attacks, particularly those against the RUC and UDR, had always been sectarian in form. PIRA strongly denied the charge: 'It never mattered whether it was RUC, BA or UDR. Once they donned those uniforms they became symbols of repression... The fact that they were Catholic, Protestant or Hindu didn't matter, we never allowed religion or personalities to deter us from the task in front of us.'[12] The image of non-sectarianism was necessary to sustain the theory of the single nation and to reassure Protestants that they would not be discriminated against in a future united Ireland. But the nature of the emotional drives that powered the Provisionals clashed with the commitment to the non-sectarian ideal of republicanism and revealed the tangle of contradictions which

7. O'Rian, *Provos: Patriots or Terrorists?*, p. 17.
8. 'Motiveless Murders Work of British Army Squads', *RN*, 9 March 1974.
9. 'British Murder Gangs Step-up Campaign', *RN*, 2 Feb. 1973.
10. Dillon and Lehane, pp. 292-318.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 318.
12. 'Invitation to the UDA', *RN*, 16 Feb. 1973.

underlay PIRA's strategic thinking.

In spite of what PIRA's leadership said, it was clear that from mid-1972 onwards, Provisional units were killing Protestants in the same indiscriminate fashion. During the 14 days of the 1972 summer truce, 10 Protestants were killed, 6 of the deaths were almost certainly the work of PIRA units.[13] The leadership formally denied any PIRA involvement in the killing of Protestants and would only go so far to accept the existence of what they termed 'freelance' elements.[14] The reality was that at local level there was considerable anti-Protestant sentiment. One volunteer in Belfast remarked: 'Maybe you can't bomb a million Protestants into a united Ireland but you could have good fun trying.'[15] Such antagonism was symptomatic of more elementary sectarian feelings which often extended to the highest levels of the movement. For example, Maria McGuire alleged that at one particularly fraught meeting of the Army Council, Sean MacStiofain blurted out: 'What does it matter if Protestants get killed. They are all bigots aren't they?'[16] Usually, though, sectarian threats were communicated more euphemistically in the Provisionals' rhetoric, when, for instance, they spoke of their aim being the 'Withdrawal of the British way of life from this island',[17] or arguing that: 'The Anglophiles must be removed from power and the Ulster-British prevented from frustrating - as they have done hitherto - the self-determination of the Irish nation.'[18] Even O'Bradaigh, one of the more conciliatory figures in the Provisional leadership, occasioned to warn Protestants, somewhat ominously, that: 'If you do not want to liberate yourselves then we will liberate you.'[19]

One of the most intriguing pieces of evidence of institutionalised bias

13. Dillon and Lehane, pp. 75-90.
14. D. O'Conaill, quoted in *The Irish Times*, 14 July, 1973.
15. Quoted in Burton, *The Politics of Legitimacy*, p. 101.
16. M. McGuire, 'I Accuse Sean MacStiofain', *The Observer*, 3 Sept. 1972.
17. Interview with S. Loughran, *Andersonstown News*, 18 Jan. 1975.
18. 'Freeman' (D. Fennell), 'For Whom is the Revolution', *AP*, 14 March 1975.
19. Quoted in *The Daily Telegraph*, 19 April 1976.

within PIRA came in May 1974 when a number of PIRA documents were seized during a raid on the safe-house of the organisations' commander in Belfast, Brendan Hughes. According to government officials, the documents purportedly revealed PIRA's intentions to foment huge civil disorder through indiscriminate violence. The idea was to provoke so much inter-sectarian anarchy throughout the province that PIRA would be able to pose as the only true protectors of the Catholic population.[20] The Provisionals admitted the authenticity of the documents but denied the interpretation put on them (according to the former Army information officer Colin Wallace the interpretation was slanted as part of an Army disinformation exercise[21]), arguing that it was purely a contingency plan 'in the event of civil conflict occuring.'[22] Even so, the documents stated that in such an event: 'the IRA has no alternative but to employ its full resources to the defence of its people in the face of the armed offensive against the Catholic working class.'[23] The reference to 'its people' being the 'Catholic working class' clearly identified the sectarian nature of the Provisionals' thinking. This was further reinforced by the plans' specific instructions to place car bombs in 'P. areas', presumably Protestant districts.[24]

The contradiction between PIRA's theoretical adherence to non-sectarianism and the latent anti-Protestant prejudice of many of its members stemmed from PIRA's role as a Catholic defence force which was still a primary motivation for many members. Consequently, sectarian assassinations were publicly rejected but implicitly accepted. For this reason PIRA never acknowledged responsibility for any sectarian killing. They were either left unclaimed or claimed under cover names. For example, in the Autumn of

20. S. Hoggart, 'Wilson Blows Open IRA Battle Plans', *The Guardian*, 14 May 1974.
21. The Media Programme, Channel 4, 29 April 1990.
22. 'Republican Plans', *People's News* (PSF, North Belfast), 19 May 1974.
23. Quoted in P. Hetherington, 'Scorched Earth Key to Terror Tactics', *The Guardian*, 14 May 1974.
24. *Ibid.*.

1974, PIRA's third Belfast battalion based in the Ardoyne and New Lodge areas of the city, claimed a series of sectarian murders under the name of the Red Flag Avengers.[25]

Within PIRA's rank and file sectarian feeling could be an all-consuming force, satiating a certain need to indulge in violence largely for its own sake. In the very early years of the conflict all civilian killings had to be authorised by brigade commanders after a full report had been carried out. Following the introduction of internment, and with the general improvements in the intelligence apparatus of the security forces, which netted the more senior PIRA operatives, such rules governing civilian assassinations tended to be overlooked.[26] This produced a movement that was often volatile and unmanageable. Reflecting on her own experience in the movement, Maria McGuire recounted:

> Once we could say this brigade was doing this and this brigade was doing that, but we could not at the end. We were saying, My God, is this one of ours', because in May and June [1972] we lost control completely... All the real IRA men are in jail now. Who's left? Eighteen-year olds control the battalions with a few fanatics. That is the organisation.In fact it broke down when the IRA men were pulled in. Command had to be given to people who would normally never have a command.[27]

Itchy trigger fingers proved especially difficult to restrain during ceasfires. The frustration at being unable to attack the security forces meant that the aggression of the volunteers was often re-channelled onto the Protestant community. During the 1972 ceasfire, the involvement of PIRA units in sectarian attacks rose dramatically, while the 1975 truce saw the worst period of inter-communal warfare the province has known. The most notorious of PIRA's renegade groups was the South Armagh Republican Action Force (SARAF), a flag of convenience for PIRA's units in the border areas of counties Armagh and Down. These units never accepted the 1975 truce and

25. J. Holland, 'The Third Battalion at Home', *Hibernia*, 2 July 1976.
26. Dillon and Lehane, p. 247.
27. Quoted in G. Wansell, 'Defector Who Finds Life Too Quiet', *The Times* 22 Feb. 1973.

were responsible for a spate of sectarian murders in the area, including the worst single incident of its kind when ten Protestant workmen were shot dead near the village of Kingsmills in January 1976.

The participation of PIRA units in the sectarian war confirmed many Protestant fears about their future in a united Ireland, making them more determined to resist such a prospect. An editorial in *Fortnight* noted in the early days of the troubles that PIRA's activities merely fueled Protestant suspicion: 'They don't even bother to make any attempt to persuade Protestants that they are really wanted in the new Republic... Virtually everything they do is directly geared to increase rather than decrease Protestant separation.'[28] This went to the heart of the conflict in PIRA's thinking between the explicit acceptance of the Protestant tradition as part of the Irish nation and the assumption that unionists were tools of British imperialism whose will to defend their position would collapse once colonial patronage was removed. In effect, the Provisionals ruled out the Protestant opinion as a factor which had any significant bearing on their strategic position. The efficacy of PIRA's strategy therefore rested on the presumption of Protestant passivity. PIRA believed that because it was fighting a colonial occupier it could reach an agreement with the British over the heads of the Protestants who would simply accept what Britain told them.

The problem for PIRA was that the closer it came to achieving success, the more restless the loyalist paramilitaries became. Once the paramilitaries initiated their widespread and determined campaign against Catholics, PIRA's strategy was fatally exposed as 'the talk shifted from "fear of the backlash" to "the danger of civil war".'[29] For the loyalists, this ensured that the simple, cheap option of a quick deal to get rid of Northern Ireland was unavailable to the British government. The political implications of

28. *Fortnight*, 29 Oct. 1971.
29. McGuire, *To Take Arms*, p. 95.

the rise in sectarian killings during the summer truce of 1972 produced alarm in PIRA's leadership, as McGuire made evident:

> It was of course in their [the loyalists] interests to destroy the accommodation the British government had come to with the Provisionals, to demonstrate that any attempt at reaching agreement with us was bound to fail... But clearly, too, some members of the Republican movement were retaliating in the same senseless way, and the slide into outright sectarian warfare seemed to be continuing. This could wreck the position we had reached.[30]

By late 1972, even MacStiofain was forced to admit that it was difficult to dismiss the loyalist paramilitaries, claiming: 'Only a fool would do so.'[31] Yet this was exactly what he had been doing a few months previously. In early 1972 MacStiofain said of the unionists: 'I can't see these people preparing themselves for a protracted guerrilla war. It's just not in them.'[32] It was symptomatic of PIRA's superficial understanding of the loyalist perspective that caused it to ignore potential Protestant power. The Protestants had proven, ever since 1912 and the Home Rule issue, that they had sufficient cohesion to resist inclusion in an all-Ireland political framework. The Provisionals chose to gloss over this point because their ideology had difficulty entertaining the idea that many of their countrymen did not want to be 'liberated' from British rule. The sectarian war confronted the Provisionals with this historical fact. It was one of the most deep-seated inconsistencies in PIRA's strategic thinking. Far from the Protestants having to reconcile themselves to the inevitability of a PIRA's united Ireland, it was the Provisionals who had to face-up to the reality that Protestant opposition could sabotage their plans.

It has been alleged that once the Provisionals had become used to the fact of the loyalist killings, they themselves sought to exploit the conflict for political gain. At certain times it did appear that PIRA was trying to stoke-up sectarian violence. For example, by mid-September 1974 the UFF

30. *Ibid.*, p. 135.
31. Quoted in *The Daily Telegraph*, 25 Nov. 1972.
32. MacStiofain Statement, in Sweetman, *On Our Knees*, p. 157.

and UVF had considerably restricted their attacks. Yet on the 16 September, PIRA touched off another round of sectarian killings by assassinating 2 magistrates. Within a month there had been over a dozen sectarian killings with the Provisionals implicated in the deaths of at least 2 Protestants.[33] Theoretically, the fostering of sectarian tension, could assist PIRA in two ways. First, by provoking loyalist attacks, Catholics would continue to seek PIRA's protection and second, communal hostility polarised society and eroded the political middle ground which destroyed any hope for an internal settlement within Northern Ireland.[34] It was a low risk option for the Provisionals. They could hope that political sterility and the threat of civil war would encourage exasperation amongst mainland opinion and raise calls for withdrawal, while being assured of sufficient political instability to give the movement sustenance.[35] There was little doubt that PIRA could be a beneficiary of the distress created within the Catholic community. For instance, in early 1973 journalistic sources reported that: 'The terror of the local people increased by every murder and its inevitable reprisal, has given the Provisionals a new authority.'[36]

One of the most substantive indications that PIRA at least contrived to turn a blind eye to sectarian attacks carried out by its own members, can be seen by looking at the relationship between PIRA and the SARAF during the 1975 ceasefire. This period illustrates the complexity and ambiguity that surrounded PIRA's involvement in the sectarian war and the quandary in which the leadership found itself when confronted with rogue elements that would not obey Army Council directives. On 5 June 1975, Francis Jordan, a local

33. 'Behind the Assassinations', *Hibernia*, 25 Oct. 1974.
34. D. Brown, 'Why Sectarian Blood Greases the Provisionals' Path', *The Guardian*, 7 Jan. 1976.
35. See R. Ned Lebow, 'The Origins of Sectarian Assassination: The Case of Belfast', in A. Olson and D. Buckley (eds.), *International Terrorism* (Wayne, N.J., 1980), pp. 43-44.
36. P. Eddy and C. Ryder, 'Seven Bloody Days in Ulster', *The Sunday Times*, 4 Feb. 1973.

Provisional commander in South Armagh, was shot dead by the British Army while planting a bomb outside a Protestant pub in Bessbrook. PIRA's leaders were embarrassed at such a clear-cut affirmation that its members had been engaging in blatantly sectarian attacks. They could not deny that he was a member as it might have encouraged the border units to break away completely. Neither could PIRA attempt to crush these units without admitting that it had lost control over sections of the movement. Even if the movement did dissipate its energies trying to put down an internal rebellion, there was no surety that regular PIRA forces would have been able to beat such tough border units. According to an informed article in *Fortnight*, the leadership reached a *quid pro quo* with its border units. So long as the name of the SARAF was used to claim for the more brutal sectarian assaults, then the leadership would condone the autonomy of its units in the area. In return, the leadership would publicly claim on behalf of PIRA any other SARAF operations which could be justified either as legitimate retaliation against the UDR and regular Army, or as measures against loyalist paramilitaries in defence of the local Catholic population. Thus, the *Fortnight* article concluded: 'It is a case of the Provo dog being waved by the [SA]RAF tail into civil war, which many of the Provos in fact believe is the only realistic way to a united Ireland.'[37]

There is no absolute proof that PIRA intentionally triggered sectarian killings as a matter of official policy. Unofficially, though, it is a different matter. The bulk of the circumstantial evidence suggests that some Provisionals were deeply involved in the sectarian war. Attacks against the Protestant community can be seen as a natural consequence of the underlying sectarian motivations of many members of the movement. The loss of PIRA's military ascendancy caused by the appearance of the loyalist paramilitaries, undermined its strategy. No longer could it expect to reach

37. 'MacMoney', 'Bandit Country', *Fortnight*, 23 Jan. 1976.

a decision in Northern Ireland through force of arms without the compliance of the Protestants. Although the leadership did not openly approve of retaliation against Protestants, it did, at least, seem adept at fishing in the troubled waters of inter-communal strife. In this sense, the sectarian conflict did help revive PIRA's flagging fortunes as it renewed its defensive mandate with the Catholics, even though the unofficial reprisals meant admittting, *de facto*, that there could be no rapprochement with the Protestants. Victory for PIRA appeared even less certain once the loyalist paramilitaries arrived on the scene, but at least the Provisionals could ensure a protracted stalemate in Northern Ireland by working the cycle of sectarian violence to block any political moves in which they were not involved. By participating in the sectarian war, one might say, PIRA condemned its strategy but saved itself.

Horizontal Escalation - PIRA's Bombing Campaign in England

The sectarian war was perhaps the main factor which stalemated the Provisionals' campaign in Northern Ireland. Of course, PIRA's limited capacity for military manoeuvre had already been revealed after the 'Bloody Friday' and Operation Motorman episodes. Now, PIRA could not even begin to make the military running without being immediately checked by loyalist counter-violence. Additionally, the growing efficiency of the security forces was succeeding in confining PIRA's activities largely to certain areas of Belfast, Derry and the border regions. By late 1972, the constraints on PIRA's ability to retain the political initiative by increasing the rate of military operations - what one may call 'vertical escalation' - was glaringly obvious. So far as PIRA's strategy was concerned, the violent crucible of Northern Ireland could no longer be regarded as the decisive area of operations.

The nature of PIRA's analysis did, however, provide a route out of the

impasse in the North. The Provisionals saw no need to alter the basic tenor of their strategy because loyalist resistance was regarded as a function of colonial rule which would collapse when the British prop was withdrawn. At most, the loyalists were seen as a tactical inconvenience because the theory of British imperialism eliminated them as a strategic barrier. There was certainly no reason, therefore, why PIRA should have wished to defer to loyalist violence by reaching some sort of internal accommodation with the Protestants. This would just be a British inspired ruse to maintain imperial control: 'The subtle use of the phrase "Settle their differences" is an attempt to shift the onus of responsibility from her own shoulders where it rightly belongs, on to the shoulders of the Northern Gaels and Planters.'[38]

Ultimately, then, it did not matter to the Provisionals if the Protestants could fight them to a standstill in the North because their strategy had always up-held that the power to change the political status of Northern Ireland did not lie in the province, but in the hands of British politicans in London. The pivotal element in PIRA's thinking had been, first and foremost, directed at using the military instrument to affect British opinion as a lever on the politicians. As Gerry Adams put it: 'the English people have a responsibility for Ireland's British problem. They have the power to persuade their Government to withdraw'.[39] In this respect the attempt to hold the military initiative by mounting a campaign in England, represented an extension of PIRA's strategy, not a complete change in direction. We can term this, 'horizontal escalation', as it sought to promote PIRA's cause by shifting the focus of the conflict to another theatre.

As the Fenian and 1939 bombing campaigns demonstrated, the idea of

38. L. MacLiam, 'Republicans Must Rely on Their Own Strength and Unity of Purpose', *RN*, 6 March 1976.
39. G. Adams, *Peace in Ireland: A Broad Analysis of the Present Situation* (Long Kesh, 1976), p. 14.

taking the struggle to English soil exercised a powerful allure for republicans. In the Provisionals' view, the British people were ignorant and apathetic about Ulster because they were untouched by the violence and because they:

> ...were informed by the British propaganda machine that the Ulster problem was simply one of religious conflict, that the British Government (by some miracle) were really no part of the conflict, that it was simply the mad Paddies killing each other and it would soon cool down with the help of the British Army.[40]

'English people should be interested in what their country's army is doing in Ireland', Adams opined, 'Sadly this interest had only come when the problem had involved them directly.'[41] By 'involving them directly', Adams was referring to a campaign on the mainland which, it was believed, would knock the English out of their complacency: 'England has to waken up and realise that the sooner she removes her troops from Ireland, the better it will be for everyone concerned.'[42] It was in propaganda terms that a mainland campaign was considered most valuable because actions in Great Britain would gain far greater publicity - the idea that one bomb in Britain was worth ten in Belfast. The effects of such publicity would ensure that the mainland populace could never feel immune from the conflict in Northern Ireland.[43] It was assumed that the feelings of insecurity would translate into political pressure for withdrawal because people would start 'to question the role of the British Army in Ireland and whether continued British rule in NI helped the continuation of the conflict.'[44]

In other words, the main theoretical thrust of PIRA's mainland campaign was an advocacy of terrorism, as the intention was to manipulate violent incidents to create a disproportionate sense of fear relative to the actual

40. 'Ulsterisation', *The Volunteer* (PSF, Lurgan), 7 May 1977.
41. Adams, p. 11.
42. 'London Bombings', *The Voice* (PSF, West Belfast), 5 Feb. 1977.
43. M. Holland, 'Why Britain is Still the Prime Target', *The Observer*, 13 Feb. 1977.
44. 'Ulsterisation'.

damage caused. The pronouncements of PIRA leaders also indicated that this was the intellectual motive. Seamus Twomey, for instance, one of the main proponents of extending PIRA's campaign to Great Britain, said: 'But every war has a psychological side. We must be careful the people don't get used to war. We increase the fear of war, when we think it is right, and we reduce it for the same reason.'[45] The character both of Twomey's remarks and of the earliest phase of PIRA's campaign in England with its attacks on civilian premises like tourist sites, pubs, stations etc., certainly seemed to accord with the theory of terrorist action which holds that it is the indeterminate nature of the threat that can make a political actor more compliant to the demands of its adversary. So, a measure of indiscrimination in targeting policy will be essential to maintain the sense of unpredictability in order to heighten the feelings of insecurity and fright.[46]

Beyond a straight terrorist motive, PIRA's attacks could also be used in a more precise way to manipulate the political agenda. Indeed, it was an openly stated aim to use the military instrument to intervene in the political process so that, 'at every stage of every British political initiative, of every British political failure in the background and often in the foreground will be that predictable, consistent act of IRA violence.'[47] The Provisionals acknowledged that their first attack on the mainland, on 8 March 1973, when 3 car-bombs exploded outside the Old Bailey, killing one person and injuring 147 others, was timed to coincide with the border referendum in Northern Ireland, also held on 8 March.[48] The referendum antagonised many Catholics as there could be little question that the outcome would be a conclusive vote in favour of retaining the union. For that

45. *Der Spiegal* interview with S. Twomey, reprinted in *The Daily Express*, 20 Nov. 1973.
46. See T. Thornton, 'Terror as a Weapon of Political Agitation', in H. Eckstein (ed.), *Internal War* (New York, 1964), p. 81.
47. P. Arnlis, 'Nature of Strategy, Politics, Revolution, British Withdrawal', *RN*, 27 March 1976.
48. *Ibid*..

reason, the Army Council determined on a show of strength on the mainland both to undermine the impact of the poll and regain Catholic support.[49] In similar fashion, the Provisionals said they bombed a London hotel in September 1973 to correspond with the negotiations between the constitutional parties in Northern Ireland to form a power sharing government.[50] These examples were indicative of the Provisionals' attempts to underscore the psychological attrition strategy by demonstrating at each turn of events the irrelevance of any proposed solution which sought to exclude them.

Later in 1975, a new twist was added to PIRA's campaign with a spate of attacks on exclusive hotels and restaurants in the West End of London, as well as on prominent individuals. Two people were killed by an explosion at the Hilton Hotel on 6 December. This was followed by attacks on banks and tube stations. Between October and November, 4 people were killed in restaurant blasts while Professor Gordon Hamilton Fairley was killed in a car bomb intended for Conservative MP, Hugh Fraser, and Ross McWhirter, co-editor of the *Guinness Book of Records*, was shot dead on the doorstep of his home. These attacks were specifically designed to intimidate wealthy and influential members of society in the belief that if these people were affected by the violence PIRA's message would be sure to get through to the highest establishment circles.[51] In 1977 Twomey confirmed the thinking behind these attacks: 'By hitting Mayfair restaurants, we were hitting the type of person that could bring pressure to bear on the British Government.'[52]

In certain respects, the targeting of supposedly select, 'establishment' figures, was a measure of the desperation which had crept into PIRA's

49. P. Chippindale, 'The Time Bomb that Blew Up IRA', *The Guardian*, 15 Nov. 1973.
50. Arnlis, 'Nature of Strategy, Politics, Revolution, British Withdrawal'.
51. See P. Chippindale, 'Gunning for the Upper Classes', *The Guardian*, 29 Nov. 1973.
52. Quoted in Kelley, *The Longest War*, p. 242.

campaign by the latter part of 1975, as it had become increasingly evident that its previous attempts to intimidate the general population were not producing the intended effects. The bombing campaign in England illustrated many of the false premises upon which PIRA based its calculations of the efficacy of the military instrument within the context of low intensity warfare. The bombings did raise public apprehension, especially when they were directed against overtly civilian targets.[53] However, the success of the mainland campaign was contingent on the fear and publicity generated by the attacks initiating a specific set of responses from the British population that would advance PIRA's cause. PIRA's thinking began from the hypothesis that having created a general level of fear through a systematic campaign of violence, the public reactions would proceed from cause-to-effect in a very exact manner: first, people would detect the source of their fear which they would trace to the political situation in Northern Ireland; second, this would cause the British role in the conflict to come under scrutiny: third, the people would recognise the justness of PIRA's cause, or simply want to remove the source of fear; and fourth, this would lead to popular pressure for withdrawal from Northern Ireland.

All told, this was a highly presumptuous strategy based on a series of wholly unproven suppositions about human behaviour under stress. Simply creating a sense of fear through a certain level of military activity could not guarantee to trigger such a precise chain reaction. The Provisionals had only to look at the effects of their campaign on the Protestants in Ulster and the rise of the loyalist paramilitaries, to see that a community's will to resist could be fortified when placed under threat. It is probably true to say that societies, like individuals, have some psychological breaking point when subjected to enough hardship. But thresholds of tolerance can be enormously high as can be gathered from the failure of city bombing to

53. See P. Chippindale, 'Capital Punishment', *The Guardian*, 19 March 1976.

crack civilian morale in World War II. Therefore, a campaign of small-scale military attacks may have little real impact. People simply adapt to a new level of threat. For example, the political scientists Peter Knauss and D. Strickland, remarked on the stoicism of ordinary citizens they found in London during the bombings of the seventies:

> It does attest to an ability to adjust to everyday terror and, to some degree, to strengthen one's faith in, and reliance on, the state. That is, contrary to the familiar diagnosis that terrorism immobilises and confuses the general public, in this case - it seemed, if anything, to have the opposite effect.[54]

The capacity of societies to withstand high levels of physical threat suggests that the notion of a strategy of psychological attrition within the framework of low intensity warfare can be a contradiction in terms. All strategies which seek to administer an unacceptable level of violence to disrupt the normal processes of political and social discourse of a society in order to achieve political ends, are likely to be inexact instruments of war. A terrorist campaign, for example, may be effective in the short term if it is sudden, brutal and indiscriminate; the aim being to shock, disorientate and psychologically bludgeon a target group into submission. If the campaign becomes extended it may allow the target population to reorientate and adapt to a new level of violence. The repetitious nature of the terrorist attacks against a narrow range of targets will make the pattern of violence increasingly predictable. The moment terrorism loses its unpredictability the strategy becomes meaningless as it is deprived of the very component which makes it terrifying. Therefore, a campaign of psychological attrition is not a timeless strategy as its terms imply. It will be susceptible to a law of diminishing returns as its ability to sustain levels of fear and disturbance in the public mind will tend to decline the longer the conflict goes on. Far from sustaining a climate of terror, a campaign

54. P. Knauss and D. Strickland, 'Political Disintegration and Latent Terror' in M. Stohl (ed.), *The Politics of Terrorism*, (New York, 1979), pp. 87-88.

can, instead, simply give rise to a climate of indifference because the continual exposure to low levels of military action may mentally anaesthetise the public to a point where they are prepared to tolerate an extra degree of violence just as they may tolerate a degree of crime, deaths through road accidents etc..[55]

The ambiguity of strategies which rely on the evocation of various psychological responses to circumvent the power of a superior opponent, illustrates the main difficulty which afflicted PIRA's campaign both in England and Northern Ireland. In a conventional war, where each belligerent is trying to defeat the other through force of arms, it is relatively straight forward to determine who has prevailed after each engagement has been concluded. In a war of psychological attrition, the outcome of tactical engagements are more problematic. The fact that PIRA's attacks often resulted in the deaths of security force personnel or the destruction of buildings and so on, did not mean that such attacks automatically related to the attainment of the strategic goal because individual operations were not aimed at the equalisation of power with Britain. The killing of individual soldiers and policemen is immaterial to the military balance. Instead, PIRA's operations sought to stimulate certain reactions amongst the population at large; fear, alarm, agitation, in the belief that the cumulative impact would wear down Britain's resolve. But trying to gauge the effectiveness of military actions with reference to elusive psychological factors is itself an unpredictable business. For example, it will be recalled from the previous chapter that McGuire claimed the Provisionals originally estimated that British tolerance would be exhausted after 36 soldiers had been killed. When this figure was reached, she said, the number was raised to 80, still to no effect.[56] The truth was that the Provisionals had no

55. See G. Wardlaw, *Political Terrorism* (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 35-36.
56. McGuire, *To Take Arms*, pp. 74-75.

idea of 'how much' would prove unacceptable to the British, so they just had to kill more soldiers and plant more bombs in the hope that this was having the desired effect of grinding down the will of the public. In reality, it seemed that the culminating point of public stress caused by PIRA violence had passed relatively quickly, both in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Thereafter, the continuation ofPIRA's campaign merely further desensitised popular opinion to the effects of violence. This was the very opposite of what was intended because a feeling of disinterest made the public potentially less receptive to PIRA's political message.

The Provisionals were aware of the extent of public indifference to their campaign, and it was a source of frustration and bewilderment to them that their attacks could, in the words of one republican spokesman, be: 'Front page news one day and forgotten the next.'[57] The conclusion that the Provisionals reached, however, was not that the premises of their campaign had been incorrect, but that they had failed to turn the military screw hard enough. A good example of the impulsive desire to step-up the violence produced by the 'frustration factor', was provided by Daithi O'Conaill in this excerpt from an interview with the journalist Mary Holland for the 'Weekend World' programme, broadcast on 17 November 1974:

> **O'Conaill:** ...What have we got from the British public, what have we got from the British people? Total indifference. They can't wash their hands. We said last week in a statement that the British Government and the British people must realise that because of the terror they wage in Ireland they must suffer the consequences.
> **Holland:** Will you escalate that campaign?
> **O'Conaill:** We Will.[58]

Four days later, the Birmingham pub bombings occured which killed 21 people. The bombings were widely seen as the Provisionals acting upon O'Conaill's warning.[59]

57. Quoted in Chippindale, 'Gunning for the Upper Classes'.
58. This interview was reprinted in *RN*, 30 Nov. 1974.
59. See 'Why Provos Brought Terror to Britain', *The Sunday Times*, 23 Nov. 1974.

Whether or not the Birmingham bombings represented an intentional piece of escalation, they did show how public reactions could diverge from what was required by the Provisionals to help them move towards their objectives. The anger and revulsion engendered by the bombings found expression not in demands for withdrawal from Northern Ireland, but in calls for sterner security measures.[60] A few days after the bombings a package of security measures, the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), was rushed into law. Among other things, the Act extended the powers of arrest and detention and placed strict controls on the movement of terrorist suspects between Great Britain and Ireland. The Home Secretary, Roy Jenkins, summed up the reasoning for introducing what he admitted was 'the most draconian programme of security measures we've ever had', thus: 'During my visit to the Birmingham hospitals on Friday and before that to Guildford in October and to the victims of the Tower of London explosions in July, I saw injuries I had hardly dreamt of since the war and I abandoned any attempt to understand the minds of people who can do this.'[61] Jenkins expressed the popular perception of the Provisionals by emphasising the incomprehension at something that was seen as psychopathic. The immediate public reaction, therefore, was to seek protection from these outrages, not to empathise with the cause of the people who perpetrated them.

We now know, of course, that those charged with the Birmingham and also the Guildford pub bombings were wrongly convicted. We can also debate the merits and demerits of the PTA as an effective instrument of counter-terrorism. The point about the PTA and the Birmingham episode as it relates to the context of this study, is that like the 'Bloody Friday' bombings 2 years before, the Provisionals had merely provoked the British into

60. See for example, 'Angry MPs Pledge Support for "No Appeasement" Promise', *The Times*, 23 Nov. 1974.
61. Home Secretary's Broadcast on Emergency Measures, 25 Nov. 1974, London Press Service (Verbatim Service), 228/74, 26 Nov. 1974.

more counter-measures which further hampered their ability to carry out their operations. The Provisionals found out that the fickle nature of public opinion meant that while PIRA's attacks might just about be tolerable at a 'nuisance' level, the moment the violence looked like becoming a real menace to society, through such actions as indiscriminate civilian bombings, then the extent to which the public was prepared to indulge the Provisionals' licence for action could be very limited.

In fact PIRA never admitted any part in the Birmingham bombings, though there can be little doubt that its units were responsible for the attacks.[62] At the time, there was a widespread assumption that the indiscriminate 'bombing of the English public into a new level of terrorist reality' was an entirely deliberate course of action.[63] According to the republican sources of the journalist Peter Chippindale, there were many PIRA recruits who were 'quite prepared to try to force a solution to the Irish problem by deliberately and without warning killing large numbers of people in England.'[64] In the aftermath of the Birmingham pub bombings O'Conaill was quick to reiterate 'that it is not, and never has been the policy of the IRA to bomb targets without warning to ensure the safety of civilians.'[65] Nevertheless, by the end of 1974, with the possibility of a ceasefire being aired, the Provisionals might have had some reason to believe that their mainland campaign, atrocities and all, were making the British position more pliable. It was a feeling that PIRA did little to dispel. Despite the O'Conaill's prevaricatory attitude over the Birmingham bombings, his faith that the campaign was making its mark remained unstinting as he promised to uphold PIRA's policy of 'taking the war to the mainland of Britain.'[66]

62. See 'The Guilty Men', *Fortnight*, April 1991.
63. D. Brown, 'Taking Stock of the Provos', *The Guardian*, 3 Dec. 1974.
64. P. Chippindale, 'Army Fears that More is to Come', *The Guardian*, 23 Nov. 1974.
65. *Sunday Press* interview with D. O'Conaill, reprinted by Irish Republican Information Service (IRIS), 6 Dec. 1974.
66. *Ibid.*.

By the beginning of 1975, the concept of bombing Britain had undoubtedly become a firmly established element in the Provisionals' military tradition, regarded as a key weapon able to remind the British of PIRA's permanent interest in all matters affecting the politics of Northern Ireland. Although it might have seemed that the campaign had helped pressurise Britain into the truce of 1975, it is questionable whether it had any real impact on its timing. To this extent, the apparent success of the Provisionals in reaching the ceasefire may have obscured the more limited strategic effects of the campaign. It was certainly not a decisive weapon as the Provisionals' may have originally thought. For it to have been so, PIRA would have had to continuously intensify its campaign to prevent the public adjusting to new, higher levels of conflict. But the contradiction here would have been that if PIRA had ever possessed such escalatory power to inflict intolerable levels of violence on British society, then it probably would never have needed to practise a strategy of terrorism in the first place. As it was, the Provisionals had to try to challenge the psychological thresholds of public tolerance with far more limited resources, which as they had already discovered after the Birmingham affair, could be a risky and paradoxical proposition.

The Ceasefire and the Recurring Themes of Republican Strategic Thought

The actual process that led to the truce of 1975 came quite suddenly following a meeting between a group of Protestant clergymen and top Provisionals in the village of Feakle, Co. Clare, on 10 December 1974. The Churchmen provided an informal line of communication between the PIRA and the British government. The Army Council declared a Christmas ceasefire on 22 December while contacts continued. After a brief resumption of hostilities from 16 January 1975, PIRA suspended its operations against the security forces

on 10 February. The terms of the truce were never formally agreed, but in return for a halt to PIRA's operations the British undertook to phase out internment and to reduce the Army's presence in Catholic areas. In addition, a number of incident centres staffed by members of PSF were established to monitor the truce and liaise with the Northern Ireland Office (NIO).[67]

From the British point of view the truce offered a breathing space to concentrate on the latest political initiative, the setting up of a Constitutional Convention, to work out a devolved form of government for the province (this followed the collapse of the Power Sharing Executive earlier in 1974). Furthermore, in January 1975, the Gardiner Committee, set up to examine the legal issues involved in the suppression of the violence in Northern Ireland, recommended the abolition of internment and the ending of special category status for prisoners which had been in place since June 1972. This formed a key part of the government's overall aim to return the province to a sense of normality. According to the then Secretary of State, Merlyn Rees, the ceasefire could help this process by creating the conditions which could weaken the Provisional's military organisation and possibly draw them into peaceful political action.[68]

PIRA's motives are more difficult to decipher. It seems that there was agreement between hardliners and moderates on the advantages of a ceasefire, though for divergent reasons. The peace-feelers via the Feakle intermediaries came at an opportune moment for PIRA just when its stock within the Catholic community had been diminished by the Birmingham bombings. The background to the truce had also seen PIRA's military campaign continue to lose momentum in Northern Ireland. In 1974, 50 members of the security had been killed compared with 79 in the previous year. Shooting

67. M. Rees, *Northern Ireland: A Personal Perspective* (London, 1985), pp. 176-177.
68. *Ibid.*, pp. 180-181.

incidents declined from 5018 to 3206 and explosions from 978 to 685.[69] The hardliners on the Army Council, still led by Twomey, remained convinced of the necessity to raise the military tempo, but recognised the value of a ceasefire to replenish its reserves prior to the relaunching of hostilities. On the other hand, the moderates under O'Conaill felt that a truce could offer a chance to test the political waters by getting the British involved in negotiations.[70] Either way, the two factions could at least agree that a truce gave PIRA the chance both to extract further concessions from the British over issues like internment and to re-establish its popularity amongst Catholics.[71] Even so, PIRA's shilly-shallying over the Christmas and New Year periods did indicate that a vigorous internal debate was going on. Initially, the movement extended its Christmas ceasefire 'to enable the British Government to establish proper communications with the Republican leadership and thus begin negotiations which will lead to the removal of the English way of life from this island.'[72] The Army Council then called off the ceasefire because the British failed to respond to PIRA's terms,[73] but still left the door open by publicly regretting the breakdown and saying that they were 'sincere about negotiationg for a just and lasting peace.'[74]

PIRA's eventual acceptance of the February ceasefire was the clearest sign that O'Conaill's moderates were now in command. The concessions PIRA obtained from the ceasfire also strengthened O'Conaill's hand. The release of internees and the reduction in the Army's presence on the streets were popular with Catholics for which PIRA could claim credit. Moreover, the immunity of PIRA members from arrest and the establishment of the incident centres conferred a degree of official British recognition onto the

69. Flackes and Elliott, *Northern Ireland: A Political Directory*, p. 412 and 415.
70. 'IRA Split by Struggle for Power', *The Sunday Telegraph*, 22 Dec. 1974.
71. 'Death of a Ceasefire', *The Sunday Times*, 19 Dec. 1974.
72. 'Ceasefire Extended to 16th January', *RN Evening Edition*, 2 Jan. 1975.
73. 'Army Statement on Ceasefire', *RN*, 25 Jan. 1975.
74. 'Army Council Want Negotiations', *RN Evening Edition*, 22 Jan. 1975.

Provisionals' position. Beyond this, lay the prospect of full-scale negotiations with the British. Presented with these opportunities, however, PIRA failed to consolidate its political ground as the recurring themes of the republican tradition were once again to demonstrate the movement's inability to cope with a period of peace. The paucity of political thinking, the refusal to conceive republican objectives in anything other than black and white terms, and the indiscipline of many PIRA units, were all features of the movement's conduct during the truce.

For the Provisionals to capitalise on their positive image engendered by the ceasefire agreement, required them to demonstrate the extent of their support to the British through the electoral process. Since the British government had lifted the ban on PSF in 1974, it had been hoped that the Provisionals might be tempted to stand in the Convention elections due in May 1975.[75] This was a vain hope. As in previous elections, the Provisionals were resolute in their opposition to the ballot box:

> Anyone who stands in this convention election, who works in polling stations or votes, is giving assent to intimidation and accepting that the orange fascists have a right to lay down the terms under which the six counties can be governed - any vote is a vote for a return to the old loyalist sectarian domination.[76]

By ignoring the elections, PIRA simply allowed their constitutional rivals in the SDLP a free run. The SDLP captured 23.7% of the vote on a 64% turn-out which underlined the failure of PIRA's boycott campaign.

PIRA's objective in the ceasefire was not to participate in what was seen as the phoney internal politics of the province but, as O'Bradaigh spelled out at the end of 1974, to get the British to pull-out. 'This requires firstly', O'Bradaigh said, 'talks with the British Government for a phased withdrawal, and then talks with Loyalists would have to follow to discuss the sort of political arrangement that would come afterwards.'[77] It

75. Rees p. 248.
76. *RN*, 19 April 1975.
77. Quoted in K. Myers, 'IRA Peace By Stealth?', *The Observer*, 22 Dec. 1974.

was the same old list of PIRA demands. Like the summer truce of 1972, the Provisionals fell into the trap of believing that they had forced Britain into the ceasefire, and were, consequently, in a position to exact everything they wanted:

> It must be remembered that the Republican Leadership did not agree to the Truce for the sake of limited peace but for the cause of progress so necessary at the time... the English must declare their intention to withdraw and have the final solution among Irishmen of all political creeds and religious denominations... Republicans have faced some thirty thousand Crown troops and police and were not only successful but stronger militarily than ever before and fully prepared for all future contingencies.[78]

This sort of exaggerated view of PIRA's military prowess was to prove highly detrimental to the psychological fabric of the organisation. The strident calls for the complete fulfilment of republican demands while being so obviously deprived of the power to achieve them was a recipe for humiliation. The British, who had no intention of being drawn into direct negotiations,[79] were quite happy to ignore the Provisionals' diatribes, with the result that the movement slid into disarray.

The problems began when O'Conaill was arrested in the Spring of 1975 in the Irish Republic and jailed for a year for PIRA membership. His loss was critical for the movement. He had been the prime mover behind the ceasefire on the republican side and was the one leader with sufficient stature who might have been able to steer the Provisionals in a more flexible direction. O'Conaill's departure clearly affected the make-up of the Army Council. The hardline and moderate factions were now deadlocked, each cancelling out the influence of the other. The hardliners were always wary of O'Conaill's political leanings. 'If they stand for elections they will get well and truly bloody hammered,' one hardliner warned.[80] With the main politico gone, the hardliners seemed satisfied to sit out the truce, assured that they could block any political move which might either degrade the

78. 'Peace By Ordeal', *RM*, 5 July 1975.
79. See Rees, pp. 154-155.
80. Quoted in 'Death of a Ceasefire'.

military structure or endanger republican orthodoxy. Meanwhile, the leadership of the moderates fell to O'Bradaigh, the President of PSF. He was an uninspiring figure who appeared to carry little weight within the movement and so was poorly placed to offer any imaginative political leadership in the face of the strengthened position of the hardliners. The upshot was that the Provisionals subsided into a state of insipid listlessness, seemingly content to peddle sterile propaganda to which few outside the movement paid much attention.

Militarily, the Provisionals also had their problems. In July 1975, *Republican News* claimed: 'As for the IRA, the Truce has shown their military strength and discipline unique, in the world of guerrilla war and revolution.'[81] Since the beginning of the ceasefire PIRA had shown some restraint against the security forces. In other areas, the claims of self-control were less than convincing. The ceasefire had immediately raised the suspicions of the loyalist paramilitaries which sparked another outbreak of vicious sectarian murders. Most of the 216 civilians killed in 1975 were Catholics, but as mentioned earlier, PIRA units also engaged in tit-for-tat killings throughout the ceasefire. The lack of respite for the Catholic community was compounded in February when a bitter feud broke out between OIRA and the newly formed IRSP. Although the IRSP criticised PIRA's lack of commitment to the 'Socialist Republic', both organisations agreed on the principle point of a British withdrawal. 'To the extent that the Provisional policy runs parallel to ours,' said IRSP leader Seamus Costello, 'we are prepared to co-operate with them.'[82] The co-operation took the form of a few Provisionals joining in with the IRSP to defeat OIRA's attempt to destroy the breakaway group.[83] The Officials came off worst, losing 3 men, including their respected Belfast commander, Billy McMillen. Yet this was only a

81. 'Peace by Ordeal'.
82. Interview with S. Costello, *The Starry Plough*, April 1975.
83. Kelley, p. 232.

prelude to an even bloodier feud between OIRA and PIRA in October which left 11 dead. The origins of the feud resided in a host of territorial and personal resentments stretching back to the split of 1970.[84] According to the authoritative journalist, Jack Holland, the Provisionals saw the truce as an opportunity after 4 years of fighting the British both to settle some old scores with the Officials and to assert their ghetto supremacy.[85]

The point about PIRA's participation, both in the quarrels with OIRA and the sectarian war, is that it demonstrated yet again how the apolitical nature of the republican tradition could give rise to a self-sustaining military dynamic. For many volunteers the ceasefire was an irrelevance. Having been promised constantly over the years that 'victory was staring [them] in the face',[86] they were certainly not going to give up their struggle for the sake of a few incident centres. Indeed, the Newry incident centre was closed down after a few months due to the lack of interest of PIRA units in the area. The ceasefire became increasingly ductile the longer it went on. Some 30 members of the security forces were killed during 1975, mainly by the rogue units near the border. Even discounting the sectarian killings and ghetto feuds, the Belfast Brigade stretched the truce to its limits by attacking buildings and police stations. The rhetorical justifications for such attacks, that they constituted retaliation 'against breaches of the truce by the British, i.e. Cold Blooded murder of innocent civilians, harassment of the community and indeed torture',[87] were a thin disguise for the basic frustrations of many PIRA members. To illustrate the point, as early as April, 1975 PIRA bombs destroyed £500,000 worth of offices in Belfast in retaliation for an allegedly violent British Army raid on two houses in North and West Belfast. An independent assesement

84. See 'The Republican Feud', *Fortnight*, Nov. 1975.
85. J. Holland, 'Provo Police in Action', *Hibernia*, 14 Nov. 1975.
86. *RN*, 23 Feb. 1974.
87. 'Congratulations to the IRA', *Eire Og* (PSF, West Belfast), 18 Oct. 1975.

put the repair bill for both the homes at £20.[88]

At the end of 1975 the Provisionals restated their belief that 'the only way to bring peace in Ireland is the full acceptance by the British Government of the demands made by the Leadership of the Republican movement', and added: 'We still honour the truce, fragile though it may be, but if it becomes apparent that our basic demands are to be rejected, then we have no alternative but to renew the armed struggle with an ever greater resolve, ferocity and intensity than ever before.'[89] In fact, the truce was already dead having petered out with the growing indiscipline of PIRA units. The lack of firm leadership from the Army Council meant that many PIRA members had taken matters into their own hands, believing that the reactivation of military operations was the only way they could claw back any political relevance.[90] In a sense, no one could blame them. The absence of peaceful political tactics to absorb the efforts of PIRA's activists during the truce meant that the ceasefire, certainly in the minds of many grass-roots volunteers, was nonsensical. To this degree, PIRA's descent into the welter of sporadic and uncontrolled sectarian violence and factional feuds was merely the logical expression of the movement's basically militaristic ideological drives.

PIRA's predicament was compounded by its growing unpopularity within the nationalist community. Quite apart from the threat from sectarian killers, PIRA's heavy-handed policing of the ghetto areas and its violent vendetta against OIRA, created a mood of despondency from which PIRA's political immobilism gave no foreseeable prospect of relief. The extent to which many ordinary Catholics, especially the women, blamed PIRA for the depressing situation was revealed the following year with the rise of the

88. 'Ceasefire Crumbles as IRA Blasts Belfast Buildings', *The Daily Telegraph*, 10 April 1975.
89. 'Christmas Message from the Belfast Brigade, *RN*, 28 Dec. 1975.
90. 'MacMoney', 'Bandit Country'.

cross-community Peace People. In the meantime, the ceasefire out-lived its usefulness to the British. On 11 November, Rees announced the closure of the incident centres and broke off all contacts with PSF in early 1976. To cap a period of almost complete disaster for the Provisionals, when they resumed full-scale hostilities they discovered that many of their operations had been blown by informers. The British had used the truce to increase their surveillance and infiltrate PIRA's ranks, and in the first 5 months of 1975 over 400 people were charged with violent offences.[91]

The ceasefire trauma was to have a marked effect on the movement. In 1981 a member of PIRA's GHQ staff declared:

> There is no foreseeable prospect of another truce or of any cessation along the lines that obtained in the last two bilateral truces... Because the British were not serious, honest or in any way forthright about their intentions, and because they were just trying to divert the IRA into a demoralising and damaging ceasefire situation, I cannot foresee any circumstances in which the army will get involved in that situation again.[92]

Although the ceasefire revealed the effects of PIRA's political vacuity on its conduct during the truce, it still begs the question, why did the Provisionals, both moderates and hardlines alike, allow themselves to be ensnared in a 'demoralising' and 'damaging' truce for so long? Theoretically, they could have called off the ceasefire at an hour's notice, yet they persisted even after it was clear, in the first few months of 1975, that the British were not interested in talking to PIRA and were busily pursuing their own political agenda with the Constitutional Convention. There are few conclusive answers, but some sort of insight can be gained by looking at the relationship between PIRA's strategy and propaganda, and the impact this had on the movement's self-perception.

The previous chapter pointed out that although the Provisionals admitted they could never overcome British military strength, they did believe

91. *The Observer* Foreign News Service, No. 34806, 1 May 1976.
92. 'IRA Interview', *Iris*, April 1981.

they could fight in such a way as to force Britain to the conference table. The role of force in this process, as an article in *Republican News* explained in 1974, was to 'bring about suitable conditions to enable political persuasion to operate under more favourable conditions than those prior to the commencement of hostilities.' This was a sound statement of strategic principle but the article proceeded to confuse the issue by adding: 'The aims of the IRA are clear cut and decidedly straight forward. They seek not to defeat the English, but to *compel them* [author's italics], through their political leaders, to disengage so as to have the way for their eventual withdrawal.'[93] Persuasion and compulsion are diametric opposites. One cannot *persuade* an adversary to feel compelled. He is either compelled or he is not; that is, when he is forced under extreme duress to take the only available option. In other words, compulsion is a function of defeat. As we have emphasised throughout this analysis, a stronger belligerent is unlikely to give into a full set of demands under the limited military duress of a less powerful opponent. PIRA's strategy could *entice* compliance but it could not *enforce* it. As the quotations above indicate, there existed a fundamental misapprehension in republican strategic thinking which seemed to blur the relationship between military power and political demands, so that minor British concessions were equated with an admission of defeat. In the run up to the truce, for example, the Provisionals believed that the British were ready to negotiate a withdrawal. The impression was reinforced because the Provisionals' had openly stated in the days beforehand that a British pull-out was 'our first pre-requisite for a permanent truce'.[94] So when the truce ended, the Provisionals had felt that the British, in the words of the 1981 PIRA statement, had been neither 'honest' or 'forthright about their intentions'. As there was never any written ceasefire

93. L .MacLiam, 'IRA Aims Are Clear Cut', *RN*, 29 May 1974.
94. Interview with S. Loughran, *Andersonstown News*. See also Bishop and Mallie, *The Provisional IRA*, p. 220.

agreement, there is no way PIRA's claims can be verified. One likely explanation of the situation was that the Provisionals managed to convince themselves that Britain was withdrawing while the British themselves remained ambiguous over the issue of face-to-face talks in order to keep the ceasefire going.[95] The important aspect here is how the Provisionals perceived their own position at this time. The incident centres, contacts with British officials, release of internees, acceptance of PIRA's quasi-policing role in the ghetto areas; all might have given the Provisionals sufficient evidence to confirm own their opinion that they were close to victory. As a result, PIRA could confidently proclaim in March 1975: 'Our military action had the desired effect. The British Government indicated a willingness to give serious consideration to the three basic demands of the Republican Movement for a lasting peace in our land.'[96] The fact that PIRA seemed entranced by the prospect of talks with the British can help explain why it held to the truce for as long as it did in the absence of any negotiations. The paraphernalia of the truce appeared to endow the Provisionals with a powerful self-image which over-rode any previous caution they had concerning the ability of their strategy to score an outright military victory. The idea that British rule was on its last legs filled the Provisionals with a belief that they had literally beaten the British in battle which could now enable them to hammer home their advantage. *An Phoblacht* drew this parallel, and this moral:

> If we look back half a century we will see that Republicans having brought England to her knees on the fighting front, were not able to follow through on the political front - consequently what was won in the military field was lost on the Conference Table... no-one can prevent us achieving the ultimate aim but ourselves.[97]

95. See I. Rowan, 'Why Rees Moved to Reassure the Provisionals', *The Sunday Telegraph*, 27 July 1975.
96. PIRA *Easter Statement 1975* (Dublin), March 1975.
97. *AP*, 28 Feb. 1975.

The statement was symptomatic of the Provisionals' misreading of their own position. They were tailoring their demands, not in relation to what could be feasibly achieved given the prevailing balance of forces, but in accordance with their own exaggerated sense of power. This raises a more fundamental question. Was the inflated self-image just a by-product of the ideology, mere propaganda bravado, or was it also an intrinsic element of PIRA's strategic thought, indicative of a more systematic process of self-deception which affected the movement's military thinking?

The Process of PIRA's Strategic Analysis - Still Looking for the Year of Victory

We mentioned in the preceding chapter that the Provisionals proclaimed 1972 to be 'The Year of Victory'.[98] Two years later the banners read, 'Victory to the IRA 1974',[99] and in early 1977 PIRA's leadership declared: 'We are now confident of victory as we face the final phase of the war with England.'[100] For sure these statements and many others like them which adorned the republican press throughout the period, were intended as rousing propaganda, but there is no reason to suppose that the movement did not take seriously its own confident assurances of victory. Such confidence was understandable up until 1972, but from then onwards the predictions of victory became less credible for external observers, though seemingly not for the Provisionals themselves. Why did they choose to deceive themselves by continuing to assert unfounded expectations of triumph? The explanation provides a link between all the problems experienced in the sectarian war, the mainland bombing campaign, the 1975 ceasefire, and the overall process of the movement's strategic formulation.

In any insurgent war, the particular conditions which affect the

98. *RN*, 2 Jan. 1972.
99. *AP*, 4 Jan. 1974.
100. 'Provisionals Confident of Victory', IRIS, 3 Feb. 1977.

conflict scenario are going to have a major bearing on how the instrument of violence will be employed. Against whom? For how long? To achieve what? In essence, this is a contextual issue which concerns the quality of the insurgent's analysis. It is incumbent upon the insurgent to gain an accurate appreciation of the circumstances in which it chooses to fight, and on that basis, select the most appropriate strategic option. The Provisionals' own assessment of the context in which they fought can be summarised concisely along the following lines: 1) Ireland has a right to self-determination and it is PIRA's aim to bring this about; 2) the aspiration to self-determination is denied by the British who seek to maintain their rule through the artificial division of the island; 3) while this situation prevails there can be no prospect of peace and justice in Ireland; 4) the constitutional arena has shown itself to be an ineffective environment in which to pursue British withdrawal; 5) force, practised within a guerrilla war framework, as in the Anglo-Irish war, has proven the only method guaranteed to shift the British; 6) therefore, force should be concentrated on what has always been the weakest link in the British design, namely, the relationship between the colony (Northern Ireland) and those who underpin the position of the colonial policy-makers (the British public). These are the terms of reference in which the Provisionals sought to construct their strategy, evaluate the military instrument and develop their tactics. We can call this, for want of a better phrase, PIRA's strategic paradigm.

Leaving aside the debate on the desirability of republican objectives or the validity of PIRA's mandate to act in the manner it did, neither of which are the concern of this thesis, how cogent was PIRA's strategic paradigm as a model upon which to devise a realistic military policy? First, let us try briefly to challenge the pivotal element which held the paradigm together, the notion of Northern Ireland as the artifical product of British imperial-

ism. The central justification to sustain the charge of imperialism, an economic motive, is missing. Historically, Northern Ireland has had the highest percentage unemployment of any part of the United Kingdom. For most of the twentieth century it has had a declining industrial sector and an impoverished agricultural sector. It has no mineral sources in abundance and is a net drain on the central exchequer. Beyond the economic motive, the argument that Britain has security interests in retaining Northern Ireland is also unpersuasive. The only conceivable advantage of the province is as a naval asset, but at best this is marginal since the Northern Irish seaboard faces the wrong way to guard the Atlantic approaches. PIRA's campaign in the 1970s merely went to underline that Northern Ireland detracted from, rather than enhanced the UK's overall security position.

Apart from the intellectual case against the colonial interpretation, more empirical evidence in the form of attitude surveys conducted in the late 1970s and early 1980 also negated PIRA's analysis. The findings revealed the extent to which Catholic opinion appeared to diverge from traditional republican perceptions of Britain, with substantial majorities indicating that they found British influence to be a neutral and, to some degree, even a positive element. In a series of polls 67% of Catholics thought that the British did not care what happened to the province, 69.9% believed that the British treated Protestants and Catholics equally, while 60% agreed with the proposition: 'Were it not for the British Government, the situation in Northern Ireland would be worse than it is.'[101] And, of course, the most significant piece of empirical refutation, as PIRA's parlous state in the mid-1970s provided adequate testament, was that the movement's strategy had completely failed to secure its objective. Even so, when the prolonged

101.Source: Northern Ireland Attitude Survey, in E. Moxon-Browne, *Nation, Class and Creed in Northern Ireland* (Aldershot, 1983), p. 116.

truce officially expired in early 1976, the Provisionals reiterated their demands for a wholesale British withdrawal, and affirmed:

> Until these demands are met in full, the Irish Republican Army will continue to resist British rule with sustained military pressure... We pledge ourselves to strike at all variants of imperialism in Ireland in the struggle for a Socialist Democratic Republic... The capability of the Irish Republican Army to develop the war of liberation is unquestionable.[102]

Yet in renewing the armed struggle, all the Provisionals were doing was persisting with something which had, after 5 years, demonstrably not worked, and with little prospect that it would be any more successful in the next 5 years. Could it be that PIRA's faith in its ability to 'strike against all variants of imperialism' remained undaunted because the colonial analysis conspired to bolster the perceived potency of its strategy? For a start, the advantage of forming the problem of Northern Ireland within a colonial context was that it fed an image of an inwardly flawed opponent; the notion that although outwardly stronger than republican forces, the British were psychologically weak, without the stomach for a fight, and unable to withstand the continuous assault on the inherently brittle colonial link with Northern Ireland. The following extract from *Republican News* exemplifies the point:

> The Brits are beaten... and final victory is within our grasp... Britain is the sick man of Europe. Her economy is virtually bankrupt, her Tory Prime Minister tries to encourage his unfortunate citizens not to see themselves as the fifth rate power they are... Britain cannot afford the money, the humiliation and the public shame she is perpetrating here... SHE CAN GET OUT NOW ON OUR TERMS AND THAT MEANS UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER ON HER PART BECAUSE SHE CANNOT MAINTAIN THIS POLICE STATE FOREVER ...the whole point is that we have proved we can go it alone and bring her to her knees. Britain is a paper tiger.[103]

The paper tiger syndrome juxtaposed a clapped-out imperial edifice against a confident and vigorous protagonist, thereby transforming a campaign of small-scale guerrilla raids into a potentially decisive weapon of victory. The belief that the British were an eminently beatable enemy was pressed

102.'Republican Army Pledge - We Fight On', *RN*, 13 March 1976.
103.'We Want Our Country, *RN*, 2 June 1973.

relentlessly in the republican media with cries of 'English Withdrawal Any Week Now' (1974),[104] 'British Disengagement Now Invevitable' (1975),[105] 'Brits About to Withdraw' (1976),[106] and '1977 Onward to Victory'.[107] The extent to which the Provisionals believed in the potential of their strategy to surmount superior odds can be seen in the following passage from PIRA's 1977 Easter Message. The passage is replete with ringing declarations of imminent victory. What is especially notable is how the movement used the lexicon of conventional war, wholly inappropriate to a guerrilla scenario, to rub in the supposed power of its strategy:

> IRA successes which have routed the enemy on many fronts are Victory signs... We Are Winning! We are fighting courageously, with determination and with great success on all fronts against British Occupation of Ireland. That the risen Irish People have withstood such a long struggle, that the People continue to go forward and not retreat, that the People not only resist but HIT BACK, and continue to do so, has stunned, frightened and demoralised the enemy.[108]

As the excerpt above implies, the corollary of the Provisionals' conviction that their strategy was capable of smashing Britain's rule in Northern Ireland, was that their superior inner-moral strength must also make them a formidable and revered opponent in the eyes of the British and outside observers. This was reflected in the Provisionals' own self-laudatory prose: 'The world recognises that the Provisionals are the greatest guerrilla fighters the world has ever seen,'[109] or, slightly more modestly: 'The People have the strongest, most admired and most respected guerrilla force in Europe.'[110] Another intriguing facet here is the way the Provisionals used the term 'the People' to suggest that its strengh and fortitude derived from mass public backing. Again, this contributed to PIRA's inflated self-image as it allowed the movement to justify its actions without recourse to any

104.*RN*, 24 Aug. 1974.
105.R. O'Bradaigh 'British Disengagement Now Inevitable', IRIS, 24 Oct. 1975.
106.*Nation* (PSF, West Belfast), 4 Jan. 1976.
107.*The Volunteer* (PSF, West Belfast), Dec. 1976.
108.'We Are Winning', *RN*, 9 April 1977.
109.'Victory For the IRA', *AP*, July 1972.
110.'We Are Winning'.

quantifiable source of public support. After all, if a political actor is apparently so close to its objectives, having all but vanquished the enemy, then by implication it *must* have 'the People's' support: 'The British military withdrawal... is a complete victory for the heroic determination and resistance shown by the anti-imperialist people and their army, the Provisional IRA'.'[111]

Perhaps most importantly from PIRA's own standpoint, was that the colonial analysis upheld the prinicpal republican aspiration that once the British were expelled, the main burden preventing Ireland from fulfilling her potential would have been lifted:

> Things will never be right, can never be right, while this ultimate source of hatred and division continues. Britain has never brought freedom, never brought peace, never brought justice or respect for humanity to Ireland. Everybody knows that what British power has brought has been war and strife, slavery and servility, shame and disgrace and cruelty.'[112]

There is a discrepancy here. How can one have a paper tiger opponent who is prepared to inflict all manner of 'strife', 'servility' and 'cruelty'? A regime which imposes a regime of repression 'more vicious than any seen in Budapest or Prague''[113] is not exactly the stereotype of a crumbling and irresolute adversary. This paradox is one which PIRA's literature does not care to enlighten. We can postulate, though, that having an enemy to which one can subscribe every kind of malicious intent automatically endows one with a morally virtuous self-image. In PIRA's case, the delineation of a malevolent antagonist could also boost its self-perception, enabling it to portray itself as a bold, determined force capable of facing down the massive repressive efforts of its foes. Such a postulation is lent weight by assertions like those of Daithi O'Conaill who told the 1973 Ard-Fheis that: 'Despite the naked military terror in the North and the vicious Free State

111.'British Army Starts Withdrawal', *RN*, 8 Dec. 1974.
112.*Eire Nua* (PSF journal), Jan. 1977.
113.'We Want Our Country'.

oppression in the South, the Movement has held its own and forges ahead in the struggle for freedom."[114] In effect, the Provisionals wanted it both ways. They wanted the image of a weak opponent to show that their strategy could prevail over the British. Yet they also wanted the image of stronger, more dangerous opponents to explain why they still had not won.

All this seemed to amount to a self-deluding basis upon which to define a coherent strategy. PIRA's strategic paradigm appeared less a means to analyse objectively the value of the military instrument, more a way of mentally framing the conflict to its own advantage by building in a process which ran from unfounded assumption to unfounded assumption, like so: 1) PIRA's strategy has proved effective which means it is going to win; 2) this means it is a powerful entity; 3) this means it has the support of the people against a common enemy; 4) this means it does not have to pay much attention to other potential obstacles (like the prospect of mass Protestant opposition) in its way. In this respect, the theory of colonialism reflected not so much a dispassionate assessment of Northern Ireland's political status, but rather an attempt to divert PIRA around hard strategic realities. The fact was that howsoever Great Britain's relationship with Northern Ireland was defined, the British were not a structrually flawed enemy and were prepared for a long term political and military commitment to the province.

The colonial theory was also vital to circumvent the question of Protestant hostility as a barrier to PIRA's objectives by linking the severance of the British connection to the collapse of unionism. 'We believe when the time comes, the Protestant people will accept a united Ireland for peace sake,' was PIRA's considered opinion, 'We know a lot of Protestants who would privately agree to a united Ireland."[115] Besides the improbability that PIRA did know that many Protestants, there is no substantive evidence to

114.Quoted in 'Victory is Ours for the Taking', *AP*, 19 Oct. 1973.
115.Quoted in *The Ulster Newsletter*, 20 Sept. 1976.

suggest that loyalist resistance would disintegrate after a British withdrawal.[116] This perception is also backed up by survey findings whichindicated that a majority of people in the Irish Republic (59.4%) and in Northern Ireland, both Protestants (87.5%) and Catholics (67.4%), felt that a British withdrawal would lead to a large increase in violence.[117] Indeed, the bulk of evidence points to the fact that loyalism has been largely independent of British policy and predicated on the suspicion of, rather than reliance on, the British government. In the mid-1970s Protestant opposition to the concept of Irish unity in general, and PIRA in particular, had been exhibited in the border poll in 1973, the Ulster Workers Council strike in 1974 which brought down the Power Sharing Executive, and in its most violent form, in the activities of the loyalist paramilitaries. All this made little impression on the Provisionals. Peter Arnlis, a republican theorist, was moved to say: 'I ignore Loyalist violence because it is pathological and parochial and unlike IRA revolutionary violence is devoid of major political considerations.'[118]

The fact that the Provisionals were so nonchalantly unconcerned at the capacity of both the Protestants and the British government to obstruct the attainment of republican goals, suggests that PIRA's strategic paradigm was no more than a self-rationalising mechanism which existed to screen out information which clashed with key assumptions. Discrepant information was not allowed to enter the paradigm to challenge or modify the parameters of PIRA's strategic thought because these parameters, so it seemed, had become as sacrosanct as the ideology itself.

That ideology and self-image influence perception and behaviour is axiomatic. PIRA remains no different in this respect than any other

116.See Guelke, p. 205.
117.E. Davis and R. Sinnott, *Attitudes in the Republic of Ireland Relevant to the Northern Ireland Problem* (Dublin, 1979), p. 88.
118.Arnlis, 'Nature of Strategy, Politics, Revolution, British Withdrawal'.

political actor. Nevertheless, PIRA's calculations of the efficacy of armed force did appear to represent an inversion of the process of strategic formulation which one might expect within a rational actor model. The rational actor model can be depicted in the following way:

Ideology →	Analysis →	Strategy
(basic motivation & the definition of objectives)	(evaluation of military instrument within context but inevitably affected by normative influences and values of ideology)	(employment of military instrument in policy to achieve ends)

In PIRA's case, either at the point of departure, or at some point during its campaign, this process appeared to have become inverted, like so:

Ideology →	Strategy →	Rationalisation
(basic motivation)	(employment of military instrument to suit ideology not circumstances of conflict)	(retrospective explanation of military instrument)

Under the inverted model, the strategy becomes dictated directly by the ideology and the 'analysis' merely a form of *ex post facto* explanation of pre-conceived ideas about the role of the military instrument. The Provisionals have described their armed struggle as 'a war not of their choosing, it is a war because there is no alternative method of winning Irish freedom.'[119] Also, they have said: 'Republicanism... clearly gave us the method to use against the British.'[120] Pronouncements like these are indicative of the involuntary submission of the military instrument to the ideology, and reflected also in the rationalising techniques of disparaging the enemy - 'The morale of British soldiers has never been lower'[121] - and the vocabulary of imminent victory - 'The Provisionals are proving that military victory is inevitable.'[122] Expressions such as these strongly imply that the employment of the military instrument was already a pre-chosen path, this is to say, that the concept of violence as the means to republican goals was as

119.D. McCusker, 'No Future Without Freedom', *RN Evening Editon*, July 1973.
120.'Dustin', 'The Neology of a Military Campaign', *RN*, 10 April, 1976.
121.C. Lambe, 'British Go Home', *RN*, 23 June 1973.
122.*AP*, 14 Sept. 1973.

much enshrined in the ideology as republican goals themselves.

Again, it should be emphasised that PIRA is not unique in having its policies formed and rationalised by ideological principles rather than serious contextual analysis. Arguably, this phenomenon affects every political actor to some degree.[123] It is also difficult to prove conclusively that PIRA's violence between 1972 and 1977 was governed by a process similar to that described in the inverted model because it takes place at an unconscious level. Rarely will any political actor set out deliberately to misapply the military instrument, still less admit it. When the Provisionals discuss the armed struggle in their publications they usually describe its instrumentality, not its emotional appeal. Neither is it clear whether the inverted process of strategic formulation was present at the outset of PIRA's attempts to fashion its strategy in 1970 or whether it developed over time. It is sometimes the case that a strategy properly formulated at the start can, over time, become internalised in an organisation's belief structure.[124] In PIRA's case, it did seem in the early years of its struggle that its strategy had been well-judged. The successful destabilisation of Northern Ireland made it seem plausible that PIRA might just accomplish its objectives. As time wore on, its strategy became less convincing, particularly in the light of extensive loyalist antagonism to PIRA's aims and methods. Yet the rigidities of PIRA's strategic doctrine prevented it from modifying its campaign to take account of the changing nature of the conflict. Moreover, PIRA's persistence in practising armed force with reference to an anti-colonial warfare model, resulted in its campaign becoming not only increasingly increasingly ineffective, but actually *regressive* in relation to its stated goals. For example, although the mainland bombing campaign had the

123.See R. Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, N.J., 1976), esp., pp. 288-315 and pp. 382-406.
124.See for example D. Larson, *Origins of Containment: A Psychological Explanation* (Princeton, N.J., 1985), pp. 46-47.

potential to sway public opinion in the short run, the ephemeral nature of its impact in terms of its ability to sustain high levels of fear, meant that over the longer term it could have only a marginal impact on British attitudes and policy. PIRA's only real hope, then, was to pursue political change in Northern Ireland itself by prevailing upon the population to conform to its views either by peaceful persuasion or through coercion. Since the Provisionals did not believe in the value of the former, they ended up with the worst of both worlds. On the one hand, PIRA's energies continued to be misdirected on a mainland bombing campaign which was just not successful in its aim of wearing down public tolerance to a point where the question of a British withdrawal became a serious political issue. On the other hand, PIRA's violence in Northern Ireland was not widespread enough to bulldoze the Protestants into submission, yet quite sufficient to alienate and embitter them, and to stimulate the rise of the loyalist paramilitaries. Similarly, PIRA's unoffical, though nonetheless, quite obvious participation in the sectarian war, merely confirmed Protestant suspicions, making the question of loyalist compliance even more problematic.

As a general observation, the tone of PIRA's headline rhetoric became more clamorous and bombastic through the mid-1970s. However, one final aspect to be noted in the evolution of PIRA's strategic thought from 1972 to 1977, was that it was increasingly possible, especially towards the latter half of this period, to detect remarks in the republican press such as: 'The basic strategy of the guerrilla fighter is to stay alive and keep fighting',[125] and: 'the Provos have fought hard and long and their survival alone is a political victory.'[126] Remarks like these imply the beginnings of a shift in nuance, suggestive of the first, tentative admission that the overblown claims to be able to win by vanquishing the enemy in battle were

125.T. Nelis, 'Guerrilla Warfare', *RN*, 13 July 1974.
126.'The Provos', *Fire Og*, 16 Oct. 1975.

inapproriate and unobtainable. But stressing that somehow 'survival alone' was a 'political victory', was also symptomatic of defective strategic thinking. While it is true in the tautological sense that surviving is a necessary requirement to achieve one's objectives, PIRA's idea that surviving meant winning provides the clearest indication that the basis of its strategic formulation amounted to a set of contrived rationalisations aimed at preserving the purity of republican ideology simply by permitting the movement to endure through military expression. It was this state of affairs that allowed the movement to languish in the 1975 ceasefire which, once again, proved that PIRA was incapable of making political capital out of its military campaign.

This brings us to the central puzzle of PIRA's strategic position during this period. The Provisionals' perception of British colonial interference in Ireland provided them with means to legitimise their campaign of violence free from any political dimension, because in their view, there could not, literally, be any politics so long as the colonial relationship lasted. As O'Bradaigh stated, there could be 'no Ulster government, no partnership and no reconciliation while British rule remained.'[127] The problem here was that while this provided an *internal* intellectual mechanism to justify PIRA's existence, *externally*, in the real world, PIRA's existence was being threatened, as shown by continued decline on the military level. Between 1976 and 1977 the number of shootings fell from 1908 to 1181 and bombings halved from 766 to 366.[128] Ironically, the very mechanism for rationalising PIRA's survival was directly responsible for its survival being jeopardised. The continuing use of violence without any political consideration was detaching PIRA from the roots of its support in the Catholic community and so making it far more vulnerable to the security forces.

127.Quoted in *The Ulster Newsletter*, 2 Feb. 1976.
128.Flackes and Elliott, Table 5, p. 415.

As we have stated at the top of this section, a good strategy is underpinned by a rigorous and dispassionate assessment of the conflict scenario. Proper contextual analysis enables the selection of the strategic option most likely to maximise political interests. It appears that PIRA forewent such an assessment seemingly to avoid confronting some of the more difficult obstacles which stood in its way. The Provisionals paid the penalty for this deficiency in the form both of a stagnating military campaign and declining popular sympathy. In effect, by basing a strategy on a specific and inflexible interpretation of the conflict scenario as a psychological comfort, the Provisionals ended up fighting a fantasy war of their own conception.

CHAPTER 6

THE EVOLUTION OF PIRA'S TOTAL STRATEGY, 1977-1983

The disillusionment experienced by the Provisional IRA during the 1975 ceasefire coincided with a shift in British security policy towards Northern Ireland. This policy, referred to as Ulsterisation, involved reductions in the overt presence of the regular British Army and turning over greater responsibility for security to the locally recruited forces of the RUC and UDR. The purpose was to restore an atmosphere of normality to the province. The Provisionals viewed the reductions of regular Army personnel as a 'withdrawal, forced upon them by the IRA's success', but emphasised that it was a 'pragmatic withdrawal with no gains intended for the IRA.' The Provisionals believed that because the 'Brits' will to beat the Irish Republican Army by military means had diminished', so they had 'resorted to political strategy as a means of weakening resistance.'[1] Part of this political strategy involved the criminalisation of PIRA by the phasing out of internment and ending Special Category Status for all prisoners convicted of paramilitary offences after March 1976.

Ulsterisation/criminalisation struck deep at PIRA's strategy as it sought to portray the troubles as a conflict between the forces of law and order versus a self-serving criminal outfit lacking popular legitimacy. The extent to which the Provisionals were vulnerable to this perception was revealed in 1976 and 1977 at the hands of the Peace People, a cross-community movement which called for an end to paramilitary activity. The rate at which the Peace People picked up support from the traditionally hardline nationalist areas jolted the Provisionals. It underlined the war-weariness of many in the community and though the influence of the Peace People was short lived, its rise signified the final demise of all the early hopes invested in PIRA's campaign.

1. P. Arnlis, 'The Brit Withdrawal', *RN*, Jan. 1977.

With the demoralisation of the ceasefire, PIRA's strategy came under close scrutiny from those whom we identified in Chapter 3 as the younger group of Northern radicals within the Provisionals. This group, composed of those like Gerry Adams, Joe Austin, Danny Morrison and Tom Hartley, were increasingly critical of the Southern based leadership. They believed that the leadership had been hoodwinked by the British who had used the bilateral truce to speed up the Ulsterisation process and to end political status in the prisons. The Northern radicals were determined that PIRA's campaign would not be allowed to drift into history as just another republican stand which burned itself out through unthinking military zeal. They planned to reshape the movement and to construct a more viable basis upon which to develop their strategy. By 1976 the Northerners were rapidly gaining prominence and by 1977 were able to establish a commanding influence within the movement. Over the next few years they were to challenge many of the precepts of traditional republican thinking.

This chapter will focus on a number of specific themes between 1977 and 1983 that were to have a crucial influence on the implementation of the military instrument. The chapter will first set out the reasoning behind the re-evaluation of PIRA's strategy and explore the impact this had on republican ideology. This will be followed by a close inspection of the revised role of the military instrument within the re-evaluation. The analysis will then appraise the successes of the new strategic approach in practice by looking at the electoral rise of PSF in the early 1980s. Although the movement entered the late 1970s in a state of dejection, they exited the decade with renewed vigour and with their political fortunes on the upswing as they progressed through the early years of the eighties. Therefore, the specific thrust of this chapter will be to analyse how the organisational changes and intellectual shifts enabled the movement to

construct a more adequate basis upon which to define its strategy. Despite the optimism engendered by these changes, this did not mean that the republican movement ceased to face serious problems over the process of strategic formulation. Indeed, these were to become increasingly apparent towards the late 1980s. The next chapter examines these problems as they emerged in greater detail. Therefore, these two remaining chapters can be taken to represent an overall critical assessment of PIRA's current strategic posture.

Reorganisation and Politicisation

The first significant changes in the structure of the movement came in late 1976 when a separate Northern Command, was created to co-ordinate operations across Northern Ireland. The Northern Command was largely autonomous of the Army Council, which was a sign of the increasing influence of the young Northern leaders who had been pressing for a greater say in the running of the movement. The arrest of leading PIRA commanders allowed the Northerners to move into vacant positions. Martin McGuinness, the first commanding officer of the Northern Command, became Chief of Staff following Seamus Twomey's arrest in December 1977 and was himself probably succeeded by Gerry Adams in 1979.[2]

The most urgent task facing PIRA's leaders during the mid-1970s was to stem the number of arrests caused by the security forces's infiltration of PIRA's ranks and by intensive interrogation methods. In 1977 PIRA's GHQ staff commissioned a report to examine both the structure and long-term military plans of the movement. The *Staff Report*, as it was known, possibly written by Adams, was found in the possession of Seamus Twomey when he was arrested. The document recommended a 'reorganisation and remotivation' of the IRA, emphasising that it should 'return to secrecy and

2. See Bishop and Mallie, *The Provisional IRA*, p. 250.

strict discipline.'[3] To that end, tougher anti-interrogation training was recommended along with the dissolution of the old system of battalions and companies to be replaced by a network of cells, or Active Service Units (ASUs), which would operate independently from each other and receive information through an anonymous hierarchy. This would limit the scope for infiltration and restrict the damage that could be done by informers or interrogations. The cell system idea was not new. A variant had been operative with some of PIRA's Belfast units since mid-1973,[4] but as a matter of necessity the system had to be extended across the entire organisation. The system was successful in stopping the haemorrhage of arrests. In 1978 there were 465 fewer charges for paramilitary offences than the previous year. As part of the restructuring process, the organisation was slimmed down to a core of 300 or so activists. PIRA's increasing efficiency was noted by a secret British Army assessment in 1978 compiled by Brigadier James Glover, and subsequently leaked to the Provisionals, which claimed that the ASU's were:

> ...for the most part, manned by terrorists tempered by up to ten years of operational experience... They are continually learning from mistakes and developing their expertise. We can therefore expect to see increased professionalism and greater exploitation of modern technology for terrorist purposes.[5]

By itself the reorganisation of PIRA ensured merely that the military arm could continue to function with less manpower and less dependence on public support. As such, it was an admission of weakness. The main preoccupation of the Northern leaders was how to develop their campaign so that the movement could become a real political force, not just a small, violent entity. This was the key to the movement's future if it was to

3. *Staff Report*, (PIRA, *c.* 1977) reprinted in L. Clarke, *Broadening the Battlefield* (Dublin, 1987), pp. 251-253.
4. See 'The IRA Shifts to New Type of Terrorism', *The Christian Science Monitor*, 6 Aug. 1973.
5. *Northern Ireland: Future Terrorist Trends* (Ministry of Defence, 2 Nov. 1978), reprinted in Cronin, *Irish Nationalism*, p. 342.

remain a strategically rational organisation. Much of the impetus to address this issue came from the republican prisoners. Away from the heady mixture of action and conspiracy they were able to reflect on the problems now afflicting the movement. In Danny Morrison's words: 'We had to work out why the struggle was not all over and done with as quickly as we thought it would be. The jail experience, the lengthy debates which I suppose could be defined as politicisation, and the experience on the streets all went into the melting pot.'[6]

The basis of the radicals' critique was that the Provisionals lacked the necessary political consciousness to exploit the momentum created by the military campaign. With no clear idea of how the progression of republican politics related to the armed struggle, few political advances could be made. As a consequence, the Provisionals ceded ground to their political rivals like those in the SDLP.[7] So under these circumstances, sole reliance on the armed struggle was not only ineffective but highly damaging. Inside the prisons, PIRA men had been able to study other conflicts like Vietnam, as well as the writings of guerrilla war theorists like Mao, Giap and Guevara.[8] Although it would probably be true to say that their conclusions were reached independently of such theorists, there is no doubting the coincidence between the republicans' analysis of their experiences over the previous couple of years and the views expressed by those like Abraham Guillen, who criticised exclusive reliance on the use of force in the context of a revolutionary war. Guillen argued that in such circumstances the military component can become an all-consuming force, while other facets of a revolutionary struggle like political agitation are ignored.[9] This situation results in what the later writings of the revolutionary theorist, Regis

6. D. Morrison, in M. Collins, (ed.), *Ireland After Britain* (London, 1985), p. 84.
7. See Adams, *The Politics of Irish Freedom*, p .150.
8. See Coogan, *The IRA*, p. 603.
9. Guillen, *The Philosophy of the Urban Guerrilla*, pp. 264-265.

Debray, refers to as 'operational discontinuity', whereby military actions appear unrelated to the objectives being sought by the revolutionaries.'[10] Debray's notion of operational discontinuity approximates to the self-sustaining military dynamic which we have observed in the preceding chapters as one of the most notable features of republican strategic history.

Fundamentally, the Northerners felt that the primacy accorded to the armed struggle was a distraction from the task of mobilising political support behind republican goals. Their views corresponded with those of Lenin who argued that reliance on symbolic acts of revolutionary violence retarded the establishment of a powerful, popularly based movement. Such acts relegate people to the sidelines of the revolutionary process by encouraging the belief that military action can circumvent the need for the organisation of the masses. Lenin believed that 'single combat', as he called it, 'has the immediate effect of simply creating a short lived sensation, while indirectly it even leads to apathy and passive waiting for the next bout.'[11] An appreciation of this sort of analysis was reflected in Provisionals' assessment of the weaknesses in their own strategy. In his assessment of the 1975 ceasefire, Gerry Adams declared: 'When the struggle was limited to the armed struggle the prolongation of the truce meant that there was no struggle at all. There was nothing but confusion, frustration and demoralisation resulting from what I call spectator politics.'[12]

The price for PIRA's increasing political irrelevance was a contracting political and operational base. The excessive dependence on the military instrument meant that the attraction for many recruits had been the cosmetic appeal of action and adventure. As one Provisional leader admitted: 'People were joining for all the wrong reasons, hundreds simply because they wanted

10. R. Debray, *A Critique of Arms*, Vol. I (London, 1977), pp. 151-154.
11. V. Lenin, 'Revolutionary Adventurism' in W. Laqueur (ed.), *The Terrorism Reader* (Philadelphia, 1978), p. 213.
12. G. Adams, Bobby Sands Memorial Lecture, 5 May 1985, reprinted in *Iris*, July 1985.

a gun to defend their immediate area.'[13] When they ended up 'behind the wire' their self-doubt and lack of commitment to the republican cause was exposed. This was exhibited in the low levels of reinvolvement. PSF estimated that only 10 to 12% of those released from internment became reinvolved in violence.[14] According to Joe Austin the number of internees who returned to any form of involvement in republican politics was barely 1%, 4 out of 400.[15] What these figures meant was that PIRA was running into the sand both politically and militarily. In any guerrilla conflict, the declining effectiveness of the military campaign and consequent receding prospects of success, is unlikely to inspire others to support, let alone join, the insurgency.[16] The result for the Provisionals was that they ended up, in the words of Regis Debray: 'Fighting to survive rather than surviving to fight!'[17]

The Northerners concluded that the military campaign could not bear the sole burden of the Irish republican struggle. This may seem a straight forward deduction, but given the weight of traditional republican thinking about the primacy of the military instrument, it was a significant landmark. For example, in 1977, even though the problems facing the Provisionals over Ulsterisation and criminalisation were accepted by republican commentators, some still asserted the old solutions. 'Sheer revolutionary determination is what is needed to defeat the latest British phase,' said Peter Arnlis. 'The military struggle must be intensified: The Brits must withdraw *under pressure*.'[18] The conclusions reached by the Northerners put an end to such barren advocacies. The *Staff Report* was explicit about the necessary

13. Interview with Member of PIRA leadership, *Magill*, Aug. 1978.
14. Text of the PSF Memorandum to the Gardner Committee, reprinted in *Fortnight*, 10 Jan. 1975.
15. J. Austin, interview with author, 6 Sept. 1989.
16. M. Klonis, *Guerrilla Warfare: Analysis and Projections* (New York, 1972), p. 195.
17. Debray, p. 134.
18. Arnlis, 'The Brit Withdrawal'.

alternative: 'Sinn Fein should come under Army organisers at all levels... Sinn Fein should be radicalised (under Army direction) and should agitate about social and economic issues which attack the welfare of the people.'[19] In many ways this was a corollary of the adoption of the cell system, which reduced contact with the nationalist community, so an attempt to cultivate a broad republican constituency was deemed essential if PIRA was to remain a potent force. This formed the core belief of the new thinking and was developed in a series of articles in *Republican News* by Gerry Adams under the pseudonym of 'Brownie', many of which he wrote while inside the Maze prison during the mid-1970s. He argued that there was a need for republicans not only to spell out their vision but to actively involve themselves in local issues which affected day-to-day life in the community. Only by these means could PIRA's campaign have any relevance for the people on whose behalf it was meant to be waged. Adams criticised conventional republican thinking on the issue: 'Who are we fighting for? There is a lot of talk about "The People" as if they are a thing. As if the people we fight for are, as yet, unborn, as if they will fit into the new order of things in our new Ireland.'[20] In later articles he continued to expand on this theme: 'Without the people we are nothing; we must be prepared to listen to their ideas, their visions and to structure our struggle so that it satisfies their needs and overcomes their oppressions.'[21]

The ideas elaborated by the Northern radicals were distilled in what became PIRA's standard training manual known as the *Green Book*. By leading the recruit through the new wisdom of republican thought, the *Green Book* aimed to produce highly politicised volunteers who would be fully committed to the political as much as the military side of the struggle. More of its

19. *Staff Report*, in Clarke, p. 253.
20. 'Brownie' (G. Adams), 'Active Republicanism,' *RN*, 1 May 1976.
21. 'Brownie', 'Revolutionary Rules,' *An Phoblacht/Republican News* (*AP/RN*), 7 June 1982.

content will be examined later in the chapter. It is worth noting at this point, though, that many of the ideas regarding political involvement predated the *Staff Report* and the *Green Book* by a number of years. During 1975 and 1976 letters began to surface in the republican press, some genuine, others possibly orchestrated by the Northern faction, condemning PIRA's disproportionate dependence on the armed struggle and the lack of involvement in working class politics. One correspondent in *Republican News*, T. Ennis, wrote: 'Left wingers are often accused of being automatically stickies by the Provos who feel the ultimatum of "Britain must go" is politics enough to sustain an anti-imperialist struggle in its fullest sense.'[22] Even farther back in 1974, an internal PSF document warned that 'the "closed circuit" mind which develops from moving in a narrow circle is a danger to the effectiveness of republican propaganda' and urged greater participation in community politics in order to expand the base of PIRA's support.[23] These pre-echoes of the sea-change in PIRA's thinking show that sections within the organisation were conscious of the political hole in the movement's campaign. One can speculate, therefore, that with or without the disastrous 1975 ceasefire, whenever the Northern radicals moved into positions of authority they would have embarked on the road of politicisation.

The first act of politicisation, as enunciated by the *Staff Report*, to allow PSF to emerge as a distinct identity, represented the first real attempt to restore a sense of balance within the Provisionals. PSF's new role was to inject political meaning into PIRA's campaign in order to depict the violence as a direct outgrowth of public discontent, rather than being independent, or merely a cursory reflection of it: 'IRA Volunteers, because they live with the people and among the people, are directly responsible to the people for their actions. Their level of support and shelter is

22. See *RN*, 28 Feb. 1976.
23. PSF, *A Broader Base: The Need for Local Involvement* (Dublin, 1974), p. 2.

dependent upon public approval for their actions.'[24]

By building up a strong political machine, the Provisionals believed they could capitalise on the impact generated by PIRA's violence in order to establish a separate political dynamic which could embrace all republican sympathisers. According to Adams, support for PIRA tended to fluctuate, rising in periods of tension over issues like internment, or else people were part-time republicans who supported PIRA's campaign but voted for the SDLP.[25] By welding a political movement onto the military campaign, the Provisionals aimed to capture and hold those who otherwise might have hovered on the fringes of the movement without actually joining it. This would enable the Provisionals to both survive and grow. The British had shown that they could isolate and nearly destroy a military conspiracy. If PIRA was part of a wider, popularly based movement then, Adams said, 'the Brit must remove everyone connected, from school-children to customers in the co-ops, from paper sellers to street committees, before he can defeat us.'[26]

The Impact of Politicisation on Republican Strategic Thinking

Becoming a more politically relevant organisation presented the Provisionals with many difficulties. In particular, the radicals had to resolve the tension between what revolutionary theory sometimes describes as 'theory and praxis'. How does one develop a practical political programme without compromising deeply held ideological principles? Too much concentration on the everyday problems of the masses can lead to the neglect of revolutionary goals. Too much ideological theory can turn a movement into a remote, ineffective clique. Too much emphasis on a programme of revolutionary

24. PSF, *Notes for Revolutionaries*, (Belfast, 1982), p. 45.
25. Adams, *The Politics of Irish Freedom*, p. 58 and p. 150.
26. 'Brownie', 'The Republic a Reality', *RN*, 29 Nov. 1975.

action can lead to a preoccupation with military technique.[27] The Northern radicals were aware of these difficulties and anxious to stress that the theory and practice of politicisation should be a unified process, each helping to inform and temper the other, because: 'Political theory is something that should expand as practical experience is gained.'[28] An essential prerequisite to the building of a new, viable republican strategy, free from the structural weaknesses of the past, entailed a revolution in the way the Provisionals evaluated the various components of their struggle. This meant developing a more flexible attitude towards the process of strategic formulation and, as such, an end to elitism and ideological exclusivity.

The first sign of a transformation in PIRA's thinking came in June 1977 when the veteran republican, Jimmy Drumm, delivered the Wolfe Tone commemoration speech at Bodenstown. Drumm argued that the British were not about to withdraw. They were 'committed to stabilising the Six Counties' by large financial support. It was admitted that the decline in the province's industrial base was due mainly to economic recession but had been wrongly attributed to PIRA's campaign and, therefore, could not be treated as a symptom of withdrawal. Part of Drumm's conclusion was that 'a successful war of liberation' could not revolve: 'around the physical presence of the British Army. Hatred and resentment of the army cannot sustain the war.'[29] The speech, no doubt written for Drumm's benefit by the Northern radicals, catalogued a series of flawed assumptions and strategic failure. It was all the more remarkable given PIRA's previous sense of self-belief. It contained an implicit recognition that military acts were not intrinsically politicising and to rely on them as such could produce the sorts of negative, isolating effects of the kind which Debray and Guillen had warned. Effects which the

27. See M. Oppenheimer, *The Urban Guerrilla*, (Chicago, 1969), p. 59.
28. 'Vindicator', 'Theory and Practice', *RM*, 26 Feb. 1977.
29. J. Drumm, Bodenstown speech, *AP*, 15 June 1977.

Provisionals had already discovered could endanger a movement's survival. Most significantly, the speech represented a rejection of the view, held by many republicans, about the nature of the campaign, that it could be sustained simply through ideological assertion. No longer could the people be harangued in the manner of Maire Drumm in 1973 who branded all those who did not support the Provisionals as 'moral cowards' who 'should be haunted by the ghosts of the Irish dead.'[30] Nor could there be any more bland pronouncements by PIRA spokesmen who claimed that the movement enjoyed 'the full support of the people'.[31] The aim now, as proclaimed in Drumm's speech, was to create 'an irrepressible mass movement' through active participation in 'the everyday struggles of the people.'

If the efficacy of PIRA's strategy could no longer be justified with automatic reference to the old republican dogmas, borne of the nationalist-vanguard mentality, then the movement required an entirely new framework to define and construct a campaign of action. For the more pragmatic Northerners, this meant taking a more functional attitude towards strategic formulation which rejected any notion that the means of PIRA's campaign should be elevated to a point of principle, as had been the case in the past. In the main, the constituent elements of any strategy were to be viewed as tactics and assessed by their capacity to advance PIRA's cause, and not simply because they conformed to some traditional republican *modus operandi*. All of the components of the strategy were to be subject to constant scrutiny. This explicitly analytical approach was reflected in the republican press from the mid-1970s when Danny Morrison and Tom Hartley became joint editors of *Republican News*. In 1979, *An Phoblacht*, which circulated mainly in the South, was merged with the Northern based *Republican News* to produce a uniform Provisional perspective on events, and in 1981 was complemented

30. Quoted in *The Christian Science Monitor*, 6 Aug. 1973.
31. *RN*, 30 April 1975.

by the periodical *Iris*, established with the same purpose in mind. The general tenor of the articles which appeared in these publications was more intellectual and less prone to repetitious sloganising. Emphasis was placed on continuous evaluation and tactical flexibility which mitigated the Provisionals' previous sense of infallibility. More stress was now laid on empathising with the people and adapting the strategy to take account of the specific context in which it was to be practised. In one of his 'Brownie' articles, Adams summed up this position:

> ...we should not suppose that we have the monopoly on truth. We should avoid jargon, we should remember that despite everything suffered by them [the nationalist community in general], new ideas must be carefully digested by many of our people and, finally, we must never forget that our ideology must be so shaped that it meets the needs of the Irish people and is not some pie-in-the-sky theory which bears no resemblance to Irish conditions or needs.[32]

Part of the Northerners' approach to gain greater public support was to be more specific about the nature of their political goals. They began to articulate an overtly socialist viewpoint, declaring their aim to create a democratic socialist state which would ensure that the Irish people gained 'complete political, cultural, economic and national control of their own country and all its resources.'[33] The Provisionals were careful to deny the Marxist label, instead, Adams argued that such views embodied a more literal interpretation of the 1916 Proclamation 'which in itself was a radical document', because, Adams said, 'It talks about the wealth of Ireland belonging to the people of Ireland.'[34] This view still represented only the vaguest of aspirations, but the way to clarify the republican vision, it was felt, was by active involvement in community based politics. Additionally, to stand any real chance of fulfilling the movement's objectives, the radicals believed that the politicisation process had to be extended beyond Northern Ireland. This was implied in Drumm's speech when he said that the conflict could not

32. 'Revolutionary Rules'.
33. Army Council Statement, *RN*, 28 Jan. 1978.
34. *Hibernia* interview with G. Adams, reprinted in *AP/RN*, 3 Nov. 1979.

be 'fought exclusively on the backs of the oppressed in the Six Counties.' Two years later at Bodenstown, Gerry Adams was more explicit:

> Today's circumstances and our objectives dictate the need for the building of an agitational struggle in the twenty-six counties... It needs to be done now because our most glaring weakness to date lies in our failure to develop revolutionary politics and to build a strong political alternative to so-called constitutional politics.[35]

Therefore, the Provisionals felt that if they were ever to be serious contenders for power, then the process of politicisation would have to be an all-Ireland affair. The Provisionals now aspired, again in the words of Adams, to be more than 'merely a Brits-Out Movement.'[36]

One of the main features of the Northern radicals' perspective, as outlined in Chapter 3, was their scepticism towards any thought of political accommodation with the unionists because they would always 'be loyal to Britain as the guardian of their privileges.'[37] To an extent, one could say that the Northerners were more realistic, more honest, about recognising the intractability of loyalist hostility by accepting that there would, according to the republican commentator Peter Dowling:

> ...necessarily [be] increasing Protestant and Catholic disunity before the freedom struggle can be successful. There is no ducking the unfortunate fact of political life in Ireland today that the loyalists will become increasingly enraged as they see their Orange statelet of Protestant privilege being destroyed by Republican successes.[38]

Alternatively, these views could also be said to represent a more prejudiced and emotional reflection of the Northern nationalist experience which was resentful at the injustices they felt they had suffered at Protestant hands over the previous 50 years. Either way, the overt enmity towards the loyalists appeared to manifest itself in practice with allegations that the Provisionals were now deliberately out to spread sectarian discord to maximise support in nationalist areas. For example, during the tense

35. G. Adams, Bodenstown Speech, *AP/RN*, 26 June 1979.
36. *Ibid.*.
37. P. Dowling, 'This We Will Maintain', *RN*, 26 Nov. 1977.
38. P. Dowling, 'The British Presence, Partition and Protestant Privilege, *AP/RN*, 22 Oct. 1981.

atmosphere of the Maze hunger strikes of 1981, the Provisionals were accused of exploiting, if not manufacturing, rumours of loyalist plans to overrun Catholic neighbourhoods.[39] There is little doubt that the Provisionals did seek to satiate some of the sectarian emotion generated by the hunger strikes by killing the Unionist Member of Parliament, Robert Bradford, in November 1981 because the Provisionals said he was a 'propagator of anti-Catholic sectarian hatred,'[40] and 'a prominent motivator of attacks on Catholics.'[41] The Provisionals produced little hard evidence to substantiate these claims.

The more strident view of loyalism, the greater emphasis on a socialist programme and the demand for increased political participation, all brought the Northerners into dispute with the Southern leadership. Differences between the two factions were openly displayed in early 1979 when *An Phoblacht/Republican News* declared: 'We are out to set up a unitary, socialist Republic'.[42] This brought a terse rebuke from the leaders in Dublin who stated that the movement's objectives were 'clearly defined as the setting up of a Democratic Socialist Republic on Federal lines', and added that 'personal views to the contrary are not Republican policy.'[43] The point at issue was the concept of federalism as contained in the *Eire Nua* programme, PSF's official policy document. The idea of an Ulster parliament was anathema to many Northerners. Having experienced unionist rule, they did not want it perpetuated under a different guise. The scheme was viewed as a relic of the early years of PIRA's campaign, a political quick-fix to attract the Protestants into a united Ireland, but now an anachronism. The Northerners believed any compromise with loyalism would merely impede progress towards

39. See D. McKittrick, 'Atkins Accuses IRA of Fomenting Sectarian Conflict', *The Irish Times*, 1 May 1981. See also Clarke, pp. 150-151.
40. 'War News', *AP/RN*, 19 Nov. 1981.
41. 'IRA: Why We Shot Bradford', *AP/RN*, 19 Nov. 1981.
42. 'Struggle on All Fronts', *AP/RN*, 10 Feb. 1979.
43. PSF Press Release (Dublin), 12 Feb. 1979.

a socialist state. In any event, it was reasoned, the Protestants would no more accept a nine-county parliament in a federal state than a unified socialist republic, so why bother offering concessions at all? As Adams sought to stress: 'We must recognise that loyalists are a national political minority whose basis is economic and whose philosophy is neo-fascist, anti-nationalist and anti-democratic. We cannot, and we should not, ever tolerate or compromise with (by government structures or any other means) loyalism.'[44]

It was a mark of the declining influence of the Dublin leadership that the provisions of *Eire Nua* had in fact been under siege from the late seventies onwards and modified increasingly to reflect the leftist interpretation of the Northern radicals.[45] The commitment to federalism was voted down at the 1981 Ard-Fheis and officially abandoned the following year. The quarrels over federalism, however, were a cover for an infinitely more divisive issue which stemmed from the idea of a 32-county struggle. In Northern Ireland PSF already had a significantly disaffected section of the population from which it could try to carve out a political constituency. This was not so evident in the South which enjoyed a stable, functioning democracy. There was no question of military operations against the Republic. The IRA's Standing Order No. 8, which had been in force for over 30 years, prohibited such actions in acknowledgement of the legitimacy of the Southern state in the eyes of most of its inhabitants. If PSF was to become a political organisation of any relevance in the South, it needed to work within the system. This raised the possibility of ending the policy of abstention from the Irish Republic's national assembly. For the radicals, who tended to view all means as tactics rather than principles, this posed no great problem, but with all the symbolic connotations of the 1969/70 split, the

44. Quoted in *AP/RN*, 5 Nov. 1981.
45. See 'The Move to the Left', *Magill*, Sept. 1980.

subject remained taboo for some years. What changed the situation were the hunger strikes of 1980 and 1981. Protests at the removal of political status had been going on inside the prisons since 1976, but had received only scant attention from PSF. It was not until a non-Provisional grouping, the Relatives Action Committee (RAC), was formed to co-ordinate outside support did the protests gain PSF's backing.[46] The success the RAC had in generating public support, in particular getting the hunger striker, Bobby Sands, and later his agent, Owen Carron, elected to the seat of Fermanagh and South Tyrone, demonstrated the degree of latent sympathy for the republican cause. This convinced the radicals that there was a sufficient basis for electoral participation, not just for the purposes of intervention to spotlight a particular issue, but as part of a long-term aim to build a strong political party 'as a necessary part of the revolutionary process.'[47] PSF's Ard-Fheis in 1981 took the first step towards unwinding republican policy on abstention by voting to contest local elections in Northern Ireland and to take whatever seats won.

The tensions that the twin issues of abstention and federalism produced were considerable. The more traditional Southerners felt that too much politicisation would dilute republican ideology and even aid Britain's attempt to normalise the North. These fears were stimulated by the Northerners' deviations from the official policy, as for instance when *Republican News* announced that 'a revolutionary strategy does not rule out - as a secondary feature - the demand by people for state funding of jobs, housing, - transport, education and health facilities'.[48] An idea of the antagonism which existed between the two factions was provided in November 1979 when the PSF leadership in Dublin issued a harsh statement declaring that 'a concerted campaign to distort the aims and objectives of Sinn Fein has been

46. See 'The Politics of the H-Block', *Magill*, Dec. 1980.
47. IRA Spokesperson, 'We Are Here to Stay', *AP/RN*, 1 April 1982.
48. *RN*, 10 June 1978.

prosecuted by the enemies of the Republican Movement.'[49] The animosity continued to deepen. At the 1983 Ard-Fheis delegates voted for PSF to contest the 1984 European elections and endorsed a proposal that would open the way for discussion on ending abstention. Having been rebuffed on both of these issues, O'Bradaigh and O'Conaill resigned from the PSF Executive. Both men had been fighting a rearguard for nearly 8 years and their resignations marked the end of Southern domination of the movement.

On the surface, the more traditional elements seemed to have reason for their concern. All the talk of community politics and electoralism appeared to signify a slide into the sort of reformism of the despised Officials. Official Sinn Fein proclaimed that 'there was more to the struggle than getting rid of British troops,' and that 'the struggle should not just be confined to the North,' or become 'an elitist military struggle.'[50] To the traditionalists, the ideas emanating from the PSF radicals sounded ominously similar to such slogans. The Northerners were at pains to stress that they were not embarking along the road of compromise and apostasy. In their view, the British would never leave of their own accord and the loyalists would always resist moves towards Irish unity. 'For this reason', Danny Morrison asserted, 'republicans cannot subscribe to constitutional politics as the sole panacea for Ireland's major ailments or as a substitute for the political effectiveness of force.'[51]

The Role of the Military Instrument in the Politicisation Process - The Long War and the Total Strategy

An appreciation of the Northern radicals' perspective, as outlined above, is vital for any understanding of how they saw the role of the military

49. PSF, Statement of Aims (Dublin), 25 Oct 1979.
50. T. MacGiolla, *The Struggle for Democracy, Peace and Freedom* (Official Sinn Fein) (Dublin, 1975), p. 2.
51. D. Morrison, 'The Provos Will Not Lay Down Their Arms', *Fortnight*, Dec. 1982.

instrument within the political process. The way they interpreted the conflict changed the premises upon which calculations of the utility of force were to be made. Theoretically, the military instrument was put in the same basket with all the other potential means at PIRA's disposal and evaluated on the basis of its functionality. As Adams declared: 'there is now a realisation in republican circles that armed struggle on its own is inadequate and that non-armed forms of political struggle are at least as important.'[52] There is little reason to think that the radicals ever doubted the value of armed force. Coming from the North they had been the ones most exposed to the militarising effects of the conflict and as a matter of temperament were likely to be committed to violence. In addition, the nature of their analysis inclined them to believe that Britain's presence could only be dislodged through arms. In 1976 Adams stated in the clearest terms that Britain had to be fought: 'The enemy allows us no choice. It is an armed struggle, because the enemy is armed. Because he protects and establishes his vested interests by force of arms... we must insist that freedom cannot be obtained and when obtained, maintained except by armed men.'[53] This was the one line of republican thought which continued to be expounded in the same belligerent fashion that had characterised much of the rhetoric of the early 1970s. For example in May 1980 the front page of *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, proclaimed: 'There is only one message Thatcher and her Brits understand and that is the automatic type which comes out of the barrel of a gun.'[54] The intrinsic value of the armed struggle was never questioned. What was new in the Northerners' thinking concerned how this military component fitted into the overall context of the movement's strategy.

The factor which was to most affect the implementation of the military instrument was the notion of the 'long war'. On the surface it appeared a

52. Adams, *The Politics of Irish Freedom*, p. 64.
53. 'Brownie', 'Active Republicanism'.
54. 'Only One Message', *AP/RN*, 24 May 1980.

simple and straightforward approach but was, in fact, a complex idea which embraced many facets and implicit assumptions. It was the central concept around which PIRA's strategy was formulated. The first, basic, assumption it embraced was the belief that due to the rigidity of British imperialism, PIRA's campaign would inevitably be protracted: 'the war to liberate and unify this country will be a bitter and long drawn out struggle. There is no quick solution to our British problem.' Therefore the Provisionals added: *'We are committed to and more importantly geared to a long term war.'*[55] The first recommendation to prepare for a 'long term armed struggle' was contained in the *Staff Report* of 1977.[56] The overhaul of PIRA along cellular lines into a tighter and more efficient force was the initial step in the development of an organisation more suited to the rigours of a prolonged campaign. Even so, the long war idea was not a specific blueprint which delineated intermediate objectives to be achieved within an extended time span:

> The stress on the long term nature of the struggle was necessary to counter any complacency which was creeping in. So while the army is geared to a long struggle it is not necessarily pacing itself in the long term. It is seeking the complete demolition of British rule by the shortest possible route.[57]

So the long war idea acted as an internal stabilising device in order to prevent demoralisation by recognising that it was impossible to predict the date of a British withdrawal. But the long war approach was much more than this. It was a looser, though more flexible and comprehensive arrangement, which enabled information to be admitted into PIRA's strategic paradigm, the concept of which was outlined in the previous chapter, and allow it to influence, and be accommodated within, the movement's thinking. For example, the notion of the long war enabled the Provisionals to accept that armed force was not a decisive weapon and would have to be relocated

55. 'IRA Geared to a Long War', *RM*, 9 Dec. 1978.
56. *Staff Report*, in Clarke, p. 252.
57. 'IRA Interview', *Iris*, April 1981.

within a broader plan. It was argued that to fight on a single military front against the superior resources of the British would be 'contributing to the isolation and eventual defeat of the republican struggle.'[58] By accepting that the nature of the campaign would be both lengthy and not exclusively reliant on the military instrument, the Provisionals had made available to themselves other avenues of resistance which could be manipulated to advance their cause, as the following statement implies:

> ...it needs to be said loudly and unequivocally that freedom unity and the creation of conditions by which we can proceed to the democratic socialist republic will not be achieved by armed struggle alone, and that armed struggle of a revolutionary nature cannot even be sustained without popular, logistical back-up and support.[59]

The first important attribute of the long war idea in this respect was that it enabled the Provisionals to sustain a consistent level of military activity while providing time to develop these alternative forms of resistance, subsequent to their incorporation into the movement's strategic programme.[60]

Up until the reorganisation and politicisation of the movement, PIRA's strategy had been very much a mono-military approach. It was assumed miliitary actions could themselves be politicising, stimulate support and generate propaganda, as well as have a direct pressurising effect on the British government. All these elements were considered to be linked and flow from the source of military activity rather than as independent variables which deserved individual attention. The emergence of the long war approach marked a shift away from this position towards what one may describe as a 'total strategy' where every facet of resistance was dealt with as a separate battleground to be exploited within the same war, thereby maximising the coercive pressure on the British government. The intention, as the 1980 Easter Statement from PIRA's leadership declared, was to 'tie

58. 'Build and Consolidate', *AP/RN*, 3 June 1982.
59. *Ibid.*.
60. See J. Barton, 'Long Kesh and the Long War', *The Leveller*, No. 26, May 1979.

together all aspects of nationalism and socialism and all the strands of rural and urban discontent into a surging wave of Republicanism.'[61] By treating different facets of the struggle as distinct units, the Provisionals could hope to mobilise the greatest amount of resources and involve the most number of people:

> Our resistance must be military, political, cultural, social and economic, at the same time. In that way we can involve all the people in our war against the British and collaborationist forces. Within that spectrum of resistance there is a place for everybody, and everybody can find his or her place. Everyone is equal in the struggle no matter what job they are doing: selling papers, collecting, picketing, leafletting, carrying out an operation...[62]

The long war was the natural theoretical framework in which all the components of PIRA's strategy could be maintained. More specifically, it provided a mechanism to hold together the military and political elements to ensure that the two worked in tandem with each other. The military arm would work to keep the political situation in Northern Ireland in a state of flux, 'to frustrate the British aim of making the six counties governable through power-sharing type institutions.'[63] Meanwhile, other non-violent forms of involvement would be used to exploit the political vacuum created by the military campaign. For example, participation in elections would be designed to 'show clearly that people support radical republicanism and resistance to the British presence more than they support the collaborationist tendency.'[64] The Provisionals believed that the long war scenario would give them the opportunity to build up a non-constitutional alternative to those parties like the SDLP. Over time they could begin to undermine the SDLP's claim to be the 'sole voice of the nationalist people'.[65] So by chipping away at the SDLP's electoral base, they hoped to 'deny them [the SDLP] positions which they have used consistently to collaborate with and

61. *AP/RN*, 12 April 1980.
62. Interview with PIRA spokesperson, *Iris*, July/Aug. 1982.
63. Interview with PIRA spokespersons, *Magill*, July 1983.
64. 'The IRA Attitude to Elections', *Iris*, Nov. 1981.
65. 'Peace and War', *AP/RN*, 7 Oct. 1982.

give credit to the British administration.'[66] The interlocking political and military sides of PIRA's campaign into a mutually supporting symbiosis was summed up neatly by Danny Morrison at the 1981 Ard-Fheis: 'Who here really believes we can win the war through the ballot box? But will anyone here object, if with a ballot paper in this hand and an Armalite in this hand, we take power in Ireland?'[67]

Although PIRA's campaign was now conducted on a wide range of fronts, the Provisionals stressed that for those who were concerned that electoral involvement heralded a 'new tendency or departure, they can be assured that the military struggle will go on with all the energy at our disposal'.[68] Indeed, if one traces the specific role of the military instrument, it is clear that it remained at the heart of PIRA's strategic plans.

PIRA's campaign objective was still to wage a war of psychological attrition intended to 'disenchant the British people with their government's involvement in Ireland'.[69] The *Green Book* outlined the main military items of the campaign which were a 'war of attrition against enemy personnel' and 'a bombing campaign aimed at making the enemy's interest in our country unprofitable.' The immediate purpose was to make the 'Six Counties... ungovernable, except by colonial military rule.'[70] So PIRA's basic strategic concept of trying to demoralise British public opinion into accepting withdrawal, remained intact. The concept was merely redefined within the framework of the long war in a way which recognised that grinding down the resolve of the British government and public did not always have to centre around the effects of military action.

The pattern of PIRA's military activity from 1977 to 1983 reflected this change in emphasis. In this period, PIRA was known to be responsible

66. Quoted in *The Irish News*, 3 Nov. 1981.
67. Quoted in 'By Ballot and Bullet', *AP/RN*, 5 Nov. 1981.
68. 'The IRA Attitude to Elections'.
69. 'IRA Interview', *Iris*, April 1981.
70. Quoted in Coogan, p. 693.

for 298 deaths compared to 598 between 1971 and 1976. The total number of shooting incidents for these same periods declined from 24,319 between 1971 and 1976 to 4793 between 1977 and 1983, and bombings from 5232 to 2406. There was a trend away from the massive bombing campaigns that had characterised the early 1970s towards greater concentration against the security forces. The total number of security force personnel killed from 1977 to 1983 remained high at 279 while the total number of civilian deaths fell to 328, compared to 1235 over the preceding period. During this time, PIRA injected a wide diversity into its targeting policy ranging from, for example, businessman, prison warders, to off-duty members of the security forces. Targets for PIRA's bombs included commercial premises, RUC stations, government offices and the occasional blasting of town centres.

The aim of this sort of campaign, according to Joe Austin, was to keep Northern Ireland on the political agenda, highlighting it as an unstable factor in UK politics.[71] Explaining the rationale for the bombings in the province, a Provisional spokesman argued that it 'irritates our enemies' by forcing the British to pay compensation, driving away foreign investment, and garnering propaganda value by demonstrating PIRA's 'determination and co-ordination'.[72] These explanations reveal a significant divergence from the previous emphasis within PIRA's thinking. No longer was the military campaign directed at making Northern Ireland an unbearable financial and psychological burden. The accent was now placed on keeping military operations ticking over to sustain the 'irritation' factor. Although the costs may not be prohibitive, the hope was that they would be considered an annoying, inconvenient and, ultimately, unnecessary affliction.

While the belief that it was public opinion in Great Britain which could act as the main lever over the British government remained the main

71. J. Austin, interview with author, 6 Sept. 1989.
72. 'IRA Interview', IRIS, 11 Aug. 1979.

constant in PIRA's strategy, the Provisionals sought to add greater definition to this point. They argued that because the 'Brits are an imperialist army... there is little effective link between their demoralisation and the British public's attitude to the war.' For this reason, the 'necessity to bring the war in Ireland home to the British people' through periodic mainland bombing campaigns remained a critical component of the strategy.[73] Also, PIRA sought to extend its attacks beyond the British Isles to the continent, in particular, against British Army bases and personnel in Germany. These operations were to be geared primarily towards creating propaganda in order to keep 'international attention focused on Britain's dirty war in Ireland.'[74] Occasionally these operations were supplemented by spectacular attacks against prestigious targets. Perhaps the best known 'spectacular' of recent times was the assassination of Lord Mountbatten along with a number of friends and relatives when a bomb destroyed his boat off the coast of Mullaghmore, Co. Sligo, on 27 August 1979. The shock caused by this incident was heightened by the killing of 18 soldiers on the same day in a double-bomb ambush at Warrenpoint, Co. Down. Spectaculars were intended to be more than just dramatic protests against the British presence in Northern Ireland, as a PIRA spokesman explained in the wake of the Mountbatten killings: 'When they've finished cursing, of course, and damning us, they'll have to question the value of continuing with their occupation of Ireland. Because that is why he died.'[75]

This type of statement signified a subtle, though important shift in PIRA's use of armed force. Military action was no longer regarded as a method of total coercion aimed at terrorising the British out of Northern Ireland but as an instrument of armed propaganda.[76] In other words, once

73. PSF, *Notes for Revolutionaries*, pp. 45-46.
74. *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50.
75. Quoted in M. Kirby, 'IRA Say Mountbatten Killing Will Not Be the Last', *The Irish Times*, 1 Sept. 1979.
76. See Adams, *The Politics of Irish Freedom*, p. 64.

the military act had drawn the attention of a potential audience, the Provisionals could then attempt to focus it on all the other manifestations of the nationalist rejection of British rule. The Provisionals could hope to point to the popularity of community politics, participation in cultural affairs, economic resistance and, most importantly, political endorsement of the armed struggle through the ballot box. The implication of statements like the one above concerning the Mountbatten killings, was that after the furore surrounding an operation would come, what one could almost describe, as an appeal to the 'good sense' of the public who would see that PIRA's violence was not the work of a few unrepresentative criminal elements but symptomatic of a wider, more popularly based discontent. Through these means, the Provisionals might establish their political credentials with other groups such as those sections of the British Labour Party sympathetic to PIRA's aims and who could have some influence over a future Labour administration. By the early 1980s it was clear that this was the direction in which the Provisionals were moving.[77]

The central assumption of PIRA's thinking was that, eventually, all the individual elements of the total strategy would coalesce into a critical mass that would produce a British decision to withdraw, as O'Conaill specified, the aim was now to apply sufficient 'pressure onto the point where the British will see that to break the log jam the declaration of intent to withdraw is the really important thing.'[78] Disaffection with the financial cost of the propping up Northern Ireland, the inability to eradicate PIRA, the lack of consensus for internal solutions, loyalist recalcitrance, continual embarrassments inflicted on Britain's reputation abroad and sympathetic politicians in office would, together, constitute a favourable political constellation for the Provisionals. The notion of unacceptable cost in this context

77. See E. Moloney 'Where Are the Provos Going?', *Fortnight*, May 1983.
78. Quoted in O'Malley, p. 284.

does not arise solely from the expense and deprivations caused by a low level campaign of isolated military engagements but amounted to the prospect of simple relief from all the petty aggravations associated with the retention of Northern Ireland within the UK. The potential efficacy of this multi-faceted strategy as it might reveal itself to the strategic theorist, can be depicted diagrammatically as in Figure 1 (page 312). This can be contrasted with the previous strategic formulation in Figure 2 (page 313). Figure 1 displays the complexity of the total strategy, spanning a whole series of measures designed to increase the pressure on the British, whereas in Figure 2, the military instrument was virtually the only mode of operation. As Figure 1 indicates, although the armed struggle is treated as one method along a continuum of insurgency resistance, it can still be seen as the motor of the entire strategy as it functions both to publicise the conflict and as a coercive instrument in its own right, albeit on a limited scale, as well as remaining the most symbolic expression of republican resistance.

One of the main features of the total strategy was that it enabled the military instrument to be governed by calculations of its efficacy rather than ideological tradition. Joe Austin insists that republican symbolism does not affect PIRA's military decisions. For example, PIRA does not consciously plan attacks to coincide with significant dates in the republican calendar, such as at Easter time or on the anniversary of the introduction of internment. The long war means PIRA plans its attacks with care and in its own time.[79] To restrict operations to either symbolic targets, such as the British Army, or symbolic dates, would not only seem an exercise in self-indulgent ideological posturing, but would allow the security forces to predict the nature and extent of PIRA's attacks. The security forces could take counter-measures and PIRA could suffer increased losses as a result.

79. J. Austin, interview with author, 13 Sept. 1989.

Figure 1. The Provisional IRA's Total Strategy, 1977 onwards

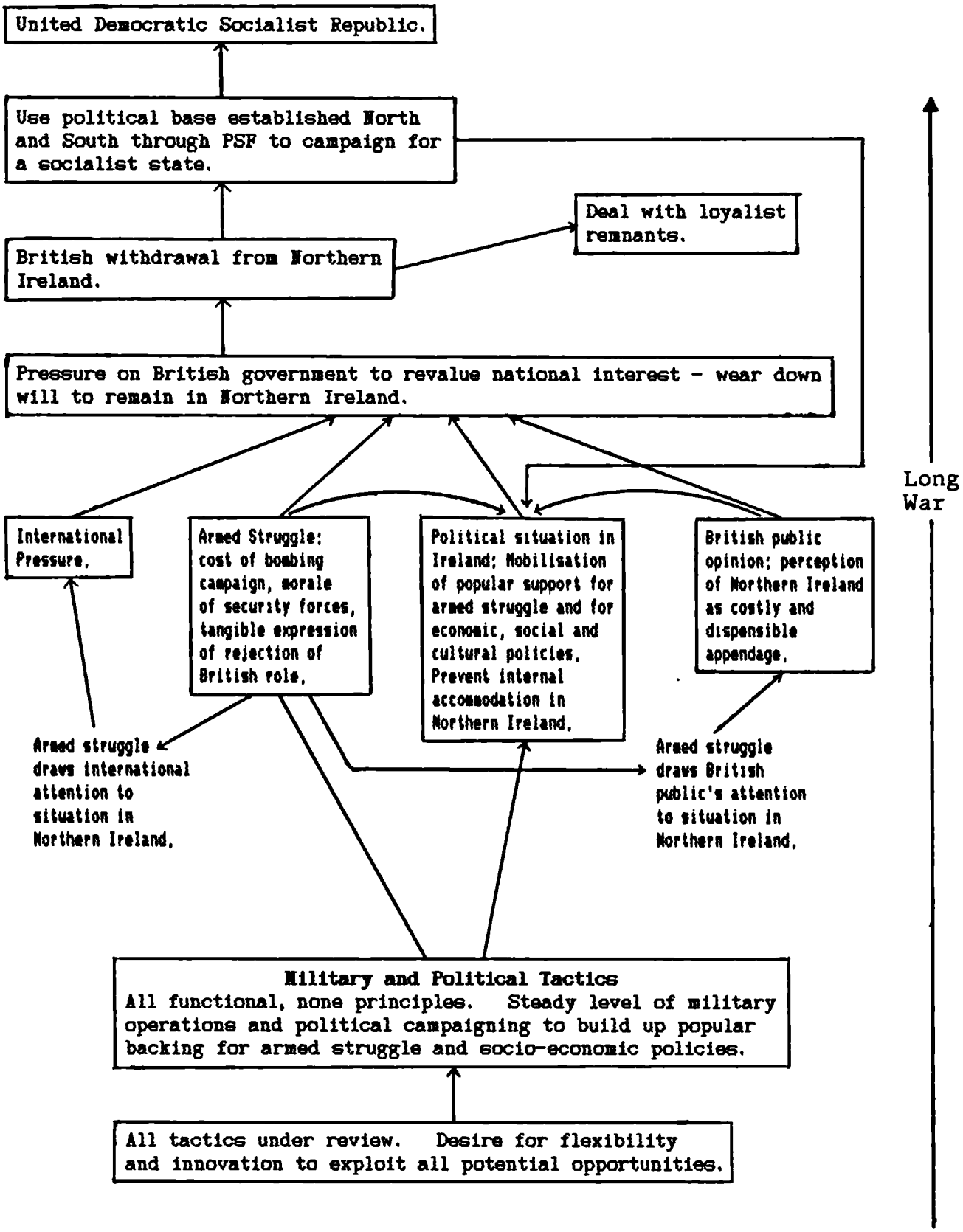
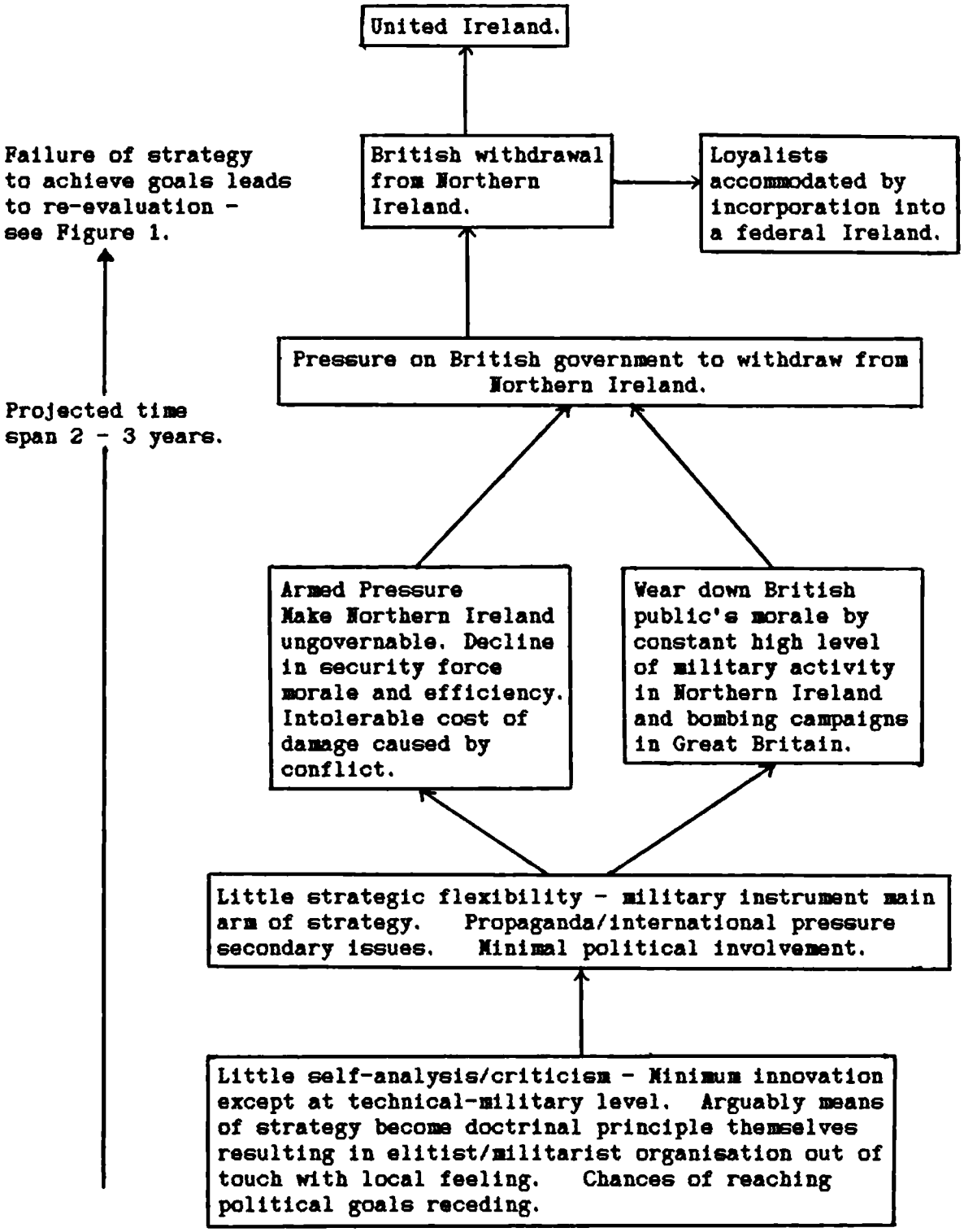


Figure 2. The Provisional IRA's Mono-Military Strategy 1970-1976



More fundamentally, to allow military activity to be dictated by the tokens of republican doctrine would inhibit the proper functioning of armed force within the long war framework. Although attacks against the most obvious manifestations of the British presence, like the Army, may have previously satisfied certain desires for revenge, the Provisionals now recognise that 'there is no guarantee that such a singular strategy would mean the realisation of all the factors instrumental in creating withdrawal.'[80] In other words, merely focusing on a narrow range of targets would dissipate the movement's stamina and actually diminish the pressure on the British.

The Provisionals have emphasised that one of the consequences of the reorganisation into a smaller cell based force geared for a long war, was that there would be lulls in military activity for up to months at a time. The Provisionals acknowledge that these have been caused mainly by problems of supply and intelligence.[81] The advantage of the total strategy is that when lulls occur the momentum of the overall campaign can be carried by other aspects of the strategy. This is a fundamental point which the Provisionals have been keen to highlight.

> ...it should be stressed that while there is a natural ebb and flow caused by logistical problems etc., it is a mistake to judge the intensity of the struggle using solely the level of operations as a guideline. While operational levels will fluctuate, political work in IRA base areas, education, recruitment, expanding the support base, all continue on a daily basis.[82]

If the armed struggle could now oscillate freely between periods of high and low activity without harming the impetus of the movement, then it was conceivable that the military arm could be consciously synchronised to suit the particular political circumstances. By the late 1970s there was already some evidence that PIRA was tailoring its operations for this purpose. The Glover report noted that the move away from large-scale

80. PSF, *Notes for Revolutionaries*, pp. 48-49.
81. 'IRA Interview', IRIS, 11 Aug. 1979.
82. Interview with PIRA spokesperson, *Iris*, July/Aug. 1982.

commercial bombings, which often entailed a high risk to civilians, was probably undertaken because such attacks were politically damaging and alienated Catholic opinion.[83] The strongest indication that the military and political components were being alternated in order to derive maximum political advantage came in 1981 and 1982. During 1981, the Maze hunger strikes absorbed most of the republican movement's attention. Adams has said that despite 'considerable popular demand for the IRA to take punitive action', PIRA eased back on its activities so as not to divert attention away from the growing political support the protests were receiving.[84] The Provisionals acknowledged the frustration felt by their supporters 'who believe that the IRA should pay the British government in kind for the deaths of comrades',[85] and in May 1981, after the deaths of the last hunger strikers, seemed to respond to this pressure in a burst of violence which left 22 dead by the end of the month. In the October, with the Maze protests drawing to an end, further retribution was dispensed with a series of bombings in London. In Northern Ireland between September and November, 30 people lost their lives, among them Robert Bradford MP. The next 10 months saw another downturn in the violence with only 50 deaths compared to almost 100 in the previous 10 months. Similarly, the number of shooting incidents in 1982 fell dramatically to 382 from 815 in 1981 and explosions were down from 398 to 219. These figures can be interpreted as an attempt to reduce the level of violence in order to conserve the political support already gained in the run-up to the Assembly elections, due in October, in which PSF was fielding candidates.

There is some debate as to whether the low levels of violence in 1981 and 1982 were attributable to a deliberate policy of restraint or to a more involuntary lapse caused by an increase in the number of arrests and the

83. *Northern Ireland: Future Terrorist Trends*, in Cronin, p. 347.
84. Adams, *The Politics of Irish Freedom*, p. 86.
85. 'IRA Attitude on H-Block', *AP/RN*, 5 Sept. 1981.

fact that the Maze protests had sapped most of the movement's energy.[86] There is also doubt as to whether the reduction in operations during the hunger strikes has set a precedent for the co-ordination of political and military action (see Chapter 7 for a detailed evaluation). However, as the early years of the 1980s had demonstrated, by allowing the political face of the Provisionals to become more prominent, forward momentum could be retained despite a decrease in the level of military activity. Whatever the exact reasons for the lulls, the total strategy did enable the Provisionals to mobilise their resources more fully and to develop a more effective interchange between military and political tactics. This indicated both a more efficient use of armed force and a marked improvement in the quality of PIRA's strategic analysis.

From Fermanagh and South Tyrone to Westminster - The Success of the Total Strategy

Just over a decade after the Provisionals' prospects appeared to have receded from the high watermark reached in the early 1970s, the early 1980s was now also to prove a time of great trepidation for the movement. This time the effects would be felt on a political rather than a military front and, as such, would pose a wider, more serious threat to PIRA's opponents.

The years from 1981 to 1983 indicated the potential of the total strategy by marking the Provisionals' successful entry into electoral politics. The stimulus was provided by the victories of Bobby Sands and Owen Carron in the Fermanagh and South Tyrone by-elections of 1981. As mentioned above, this convinced the Northern leaders, who had been working towards electoral participation, that a sufficient reservoir of alienated Catholic opinion existed to sustain a long-term political challenge. The elections in October 1982 to a new assembly as part of Secretary of State James

86. See Bishop and Mallie, p. 294.

Prior's 'rolling devolution' initiative, provided the first chance to see how PSF's vote would fare. The outcome was acclaimed as a substantial advance for PSF which had 5 of its 12 candidates elected on 10.1% of the vote (64,191 first preference votes). PSF's impact was confirmed in the June 1983 general election when Gerry Adams was elected as abstentionist MP for West Belfast. The party raised its share of the vote in the province to 13.4% (102,701 votes).

The two results were a triumph for PSF, especially as they represented a clear erosion of the SDLP's hold on the nationalist vote. PSF's result in 1983 constituted 42% of the nationalist vote and led O'Bradaigh to predict that PSF would overtake the SDLP within two years.[87] The common perception of PSF in this period was of a young, energetic and election-hungry party, a world away from the suspicious and lack lustre attitudes that had characterised the movement's previous approach to most political matters. Moreover, its message of uncompromising nationalism contrasted favourably in the minds of many Catholics to the SDLP's continuing failure to deliver any power into nationalist hands. A MORI poll conducted in June 1984 revealed that those who voted for PSF perceived the party to be well-led, community based, and in touch with local feelings. Significantly, 84% believed that one of PSF's main electoral assets was its ability to make the British take notice of nationalists. In this regard, the duality of force and politics was highly pertinent for PSF supporters, 70% of whom agreed that violence could be justified to bring about political change.[88]

The degree of support for PSF not only gave the Provisionals themselves a huge boost in confidence but succeeded in attracting renewed external interest. Contacts with members of the British Labour Party had been

87. R. O'Bradaigh, 'Election a Turning Point', *AP/RN*, 16 June 1983.
88. See E. Moxon-Browne, 'Alienation: The Case of Catholics in Northern Ireland', in M. Slann and B. Schechterman (eds), *Multi-Dimensional Terrorism* (Boulder, Colorado, 1987), p. 105.

increasing since the 1981 hunger strikes. In July 1983 Gerry Adams was received in London as a guest of Ken Livingstone, leader of the Greater London Council. Adams saw this as an opportunity to establish a dialogue with the British people so that republican ideas could be 'put to an audience ignorant of these views.'[89] These developments caused palpitations in government circles both in London and Dublin. James Prior stated publicly his fear that the 'revolutionary' image of PSF might help it displace the SDLP.[90] This admission was a sign of how far the governments in Britain and Ireland had been thrown back on the defensive. For the first time in the current phase of the troubles they were faced with a counter-insurgency problem which extended beyond the bounds of mere security provision. A situation where there was no nationalist majority for any form of constitutional politics in Northern Ireland threatened to have a serious destabilising influence, because the basis for an internal solution would be rendered untenable. Adams declared that by undermining the SDLP, PSF could hope to establish 'a sort of republican veto'.[91] Concern at such a prospect led the London and Dublin governments to embark on a search for a political framework to contain the growth of PSF which was eventually to lead to the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985.

The reasons for PSF's success at the polls resided in a wide historical, political and socio-economic context which lies outside the scope of this study. However, the progression of the Provisionals to this point was a testament to the mix of violence and politics contained in the long war/total strategy plan. The Provisionals have maintained this strategic format more or less intact to this day. So, what can be said about the improvements in the way the Provisionals now evaluate their strategy?

In abstract terms one can say that the reorganisation and politici-

89. G. Adams, in Collins, *Ireland After Britain*, p. 2.
90. 'Prior Fears Rise of Sinn Fein', *The Financial Times*, 14 Nov. 1983.
91. Interview with G. Adams, *Magill*, July 1983.

sation of the Provisionals has closed the gap between the notions of absolute rationality and absolute irrationality - the two polar opposites of strategic theory. PIRA's previous attitude to the use of violence tended towards the latter end of the spectrum. For most of the 1970s physical force was regarded as functional, but it was also seen as an all embracing symbol of republican struggle and, as a result, largely autonomous of all other considerations. The attempt to connect the struggle with a semblance of popular legitimacy has enabled PIRA to move away from the overt reliance on doctrinal symbolism to justify its existence. Now the republican attitude is to increase support for the movement and to ensure that PIRA's position is understood within the nationalist community. For example, the *Green Book* states that 'we do not employ revolutionary violence without being able to illustrate that we have no recourse to any other means.'[92]

The recognition that violence should be treated more as a direct expression of political purpose has helped to redress the previous deficiency in contextual analysis. The most significant step forward in this sense was the acceptance in the late 1970s that with the protraction of the struggle a change in direction was necessary which would, as a matter of course, affect the employment of the military instrument. This demanded an overhaul not just of the organisation, but more importantly, of the republican mentality itself. It meant an end to ideological elitism, a willingness to be more self-critical and to acknowledge that the struggle could no longer be built solely upon an armed conspiracy. Therefore, widening the struggle to include political participation presented a new set of challenges for the Provisionals. The essence of this position was summed up by Adams in one of his 'Brownie' articles:

> While it may be possible to struggle on without mass support, to be successful we must strive towards mobilising the maximum amount of people and enlisting their support, in a structured manner based on their

92. Quoted in Coogan, p. 688.

needs and geared towards republican people's objectives. We cannot gain the republic without the people. We cannot do it on our own.[93]

These sorts of views represent a greater inclination to engage in a more sober assessment of the situation in which the movement finds itself. As we have mentioned already, this has been seen most clearly in the Provisionals' attitude to the Protestant community which now recognises that loyalism is wholly incompatible with republican objectives. Also, the Provisionals have come to accept that loyalism will not automatically fade away after a British withdrawal. The possibility of further extensive conflict is admitted, but they argue that just 'how much blood is shed depends entirely on the British government'.[94] Less realistically in this respect, the Provisionals believe that a commitment to withdraw should also require the British to disarm all loyalist forces. In Morrison's words: 'We want a commitment that they will get out lock, stock and barrel. If they leave behind 30,000 armed loyalist in the UDR and RUC, that's a recipe for disaster.'[95] This tends to miss the rather obvious point that the existing security forces have enough trouble trying to disarm a couple of hundred republicans. To put it mildly, disarming '30,000 armed loyalists' could prove slightly more problematic.

Overall, though, the long war has made the Provisionals more sensitive to the dimensions of the conflict and more mindful of the limitations of their strategy. They have striven to point out that PIRA's military strength should not be exaggerated or be subject to excessive rhetorical bravado, as the *Green Book* insists, 'we do not claim that we are going to escalate the war if we cannot do just that'.[96] This contrasts with some of the wilder claims made for PIRA's military capabilities earlier in the 1970s.

93. 'Brownie', 'Revolutionary Rules'.
94. Quoted in O'Malley, p. 284.
95. D. Morrison, interview in *Marxism Today*, Dec. 1981, cited in A. Aughey, 'Political Violence in Northern Ireland', in H. Tucker (ed.), *Combating the Terrorists* (New York, 1988), p. 90.
96. Quoted in Coogan, p. 688.

The experience of the 1970s has underlined the basic reality of the relationship between PIRA and its more powerful adversary. The assessment of Britain's performance in the Falklands in 1982 rammed home the message to any wishful thinkers left in PIRA's ranks. One of the most lucid expositions of PIRA's strategy to have appeared in the republican press, 'Lessons of Malvinas' by Peter Dowling, put it succinctly: 'Given the obviously permanent (if slightly shifting) IRA/Britain imbalance of personnel, firepower and technology, the idea of getting rid of the British by purely military means is totally unrealistic.'[97]

The awareness of the extent of British military strength reveals the essence of the long war approach as a highly cautious strategy which aims to avoid the provocation of counter-measures that may harm PIRA directly or further restrict the conditions in which it can operate, as happened with Operation Motorman for instance. This is why, for example, the killing of UDR and RUC members, on or off duty, is such an attractive military option. They are low risk operations which the security forces can do little to stop. They do not transgress any scruples PIRA has about appearing sectarian. Yet such actions are sufficiently disparate and removed from the experience of people in the rest of the UK not to contribute to anything which might incite the authorities into a crackdown. At the same time, these operations have aided PIRA's purpose by keeping the military pot boiling in Northern Ireland while stirring up the Protestants. With sharpened feelings of contempt for the loyalists, the Provisionals believe they can play them off against the British by goading them into backlashes which will alienate opinion in Great Britain. Referring to the protests organised by Ian Paisley after the killing of Robert Bradford, Richard McAuley of PSF said: 'Provided the protests do not lead to civil war, they are not unwelcome. We believe they could bring forward a British withdrawal by three or

97. P. Dowling, 'Lessons of the Malvinas', *AP/RN*, 8 July 1982.

four years, and in that sense they are useful.'[98]

The long war highlights how attenuated the military instrument has become, certainly in comparison to the high level of operations in the early 1970s. Nowadays, PIRA's operations, even against its most favoured targets like the Army and the RUC, are conducted at a relatively low level. The fascinating aspect of this situation is the extent to which the phenomenon of tacit bargaining appears to be at work within the military dimension of the conflict. The notion of tacit bargaining deals with the idea that in war combatants may come to a mutual, though implicit, understanding to observe a degree of restraint to keep the conflict within certain boundaries.[99] In Joe Austin's view, the British and PIRA have reached a level of military confrontation which both sides can tolerate without endangering their interests. PIRA cannot escalate for fear it would provoke the British. The British cannot do likewise without incurring domestic and international opprobrium. This view is also confirmed on the British side. A former British Army officer with experience in Northern Ireland has remarked: 'If an unwritten rule is put into play such as: stay with legitimate [i.e. security force] targets and we will play the game but go outside those then it is open season on the key men. This can have a useful effect of serving to contain the mad dogs.'[100] In Austin's words, both sides have 'fought each other to a standstill' with the resources each are prepared to commit.'[101] The most intriguing angle here is that the most crucial battlefield now appears to take place *below* the military threshold.

The pivotal question for PIRA's strategy is can it affect the correlation of forces between the two sides? The Falklands war provided a good foil to PIRA's campaign. The war was short and the moral issues relatively

98. Quoted in 'Paisley's Action Day Cheers Republicans', *The Daily Telegraph* 23 Nov. 1981.
99. See Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict*, pp. 53-67 and pp. 74-77.
100. Quoted in J. Adams, *et al*, *Ambush* (London, 1988), p. 89.
101. J. Austin, interview with author, 6 Sept. 1989.

clear cut. As a consequence, the government enjoyed high levels of public support for its actions. These factors helped Britain to victory in 1982. The Provisionals' intention has been to deny such favourable circumstances. By mounting a systematic campaign of minor military engagements, PIRA believes it can sufficiently lengthen the duration of the war to drive a psychological wedge through British society. Faced with so many *political* difficulties in dealing with a low level military threat, it is hoped that the authorities will be unable to avoid becoming embroiled in controversy. Eventually, dissensions over 'shoot-to-kill' allegations, hunger strikes, issues of civil liberties, law and order etc. will adequately muddy the waters concerning the legitimacy of British involvement in Northern Ireland to destroy domestic consensus, and so undercut Britain's political will to stay.

Greater acceptance of the wide power differential with Britain has been reflected in the moderation of the once frenetic tones of the movement's public language. Gone are the ideas of a fundamentally flawed opponent, and the more fanatical sense of inevitably. It is now accepted that nothing PIRA can do on its own can bring about the movement's objectives and that, at best, it can only exert indirect leverage over its adversary. The reality, as Dowling emphasised, is that: 'however contradictory and unpalatable it may seem, the struggle to remove the British from here will only be brought to a successful conclusion at the behest of British public opinion stirred by the successful military actions of Irish republicans.'[102] The Provisionals now seem to have a firmer grasp on the simple, but essential, strategic axiom that the extent of the goals sought through warfare are usually made in proportion to the effort and resources devoted to the conflict. The Provisionals are under no illusions that the ambitious nature of their objectives requires a concerted long-term collective effort on all

102.See Dowling, 'Leesons of Malvinas'.

fronts: 'There is work to be done. There is no magic formula. Only hard, intelligent building, consolidating and building again!'[103]

The most notable aspect of the total strategy is that it at least tries to address the problem of material inferiority. PIRA's philosophy is, as Morrison has said, 'to keep all tactical options open, provided it never loses sight of the end result.'[104] In this way, the Provisionals can put far more factors into play and fight it out in arenas where the British do not possess any obvious pre-eminence. Using the military effort to undermine the stability of Northern Ireland, the movement can attract notoriety which it can use to further publicise its social, economic and cultural policies. Support for these policies, and by inference PIRA's armed struggle, as expressed through elections, can generate propaganda which can be used to gain sympathy abroad and discredit British involvement in Northern Ireland. In so doing, the Provisionals believe that the passage of time will gnaw away at the British psyche, and culminate in a decision to withdraw through exasperation.

The Provisionals can now see more clearly that the political effect of the campaign is the most crucial element which makes the strategy efficacious, rather than the direct repercussions individual engagements may have in the military field. Dowling's article 'Lessons of Malvinas', stressed that every tactic should be scrutinised in the light of this requirement, adding: 'All actions should seek to unite and maximise nationalist support, and should be comprehensible to those supporters in the South who do not daily experience repression.'[105] It is to serve these goals that in 1978 PSF emerged as an overt organisation ready to publicly advocate republican policies. Previous to that, Morrison said, 'our politics had always been

103.'Build and Consolidate'.
104.Morrison, in Collins, *Ireland After Britain*, p. 93.
105.Dowling, 'Lessons of the Malvinas'.

talked about and sold below the counter.'[106] PSF is now integral to the republican struggle. Adams has stipulated that the 'party must be ideologically united on radical republican objectives and capable of formulating and implementing long-term and short-term strategies.'[107] Allowing PSF to campaign independently of the armed struggle, while being supportive of it, enables the republican movement to move forward on a wide front and its message to be disseminated to the widest possible audience.

The advantage of the restructuring process is that Provisionals are now able to be more precise about exploiting the propaganda effects of their campaign. This enhances the overall strategy by allowing the movement to pack a greater political punch behind each military action. The total strategy does not overcome PIRA's deficiency in power, but it at least maximises its options, to make it a more potent coercive weapon than if it had to rely purely on the military instrument. In this sense, the total strategy acts as a substitute for the risky pursuit of military escalation. By letting political initiatives back up military action, the Provisionals can portray themselves, both inside and outside Ireland, as a strong and popularly based movement. Thus, the Provisionals have the opportunity to build up their credibility and project an image of power without running the risk of either provoking damaging counter-measures or alienating public opinion, both of which are inherent in any decision to escalate.

The Evolving Strategy

By way of conclusion to this chapter, and looking in a longer historial perspective, we can say that the most significant feature about the adoption of the total strategy is that it represents an attempt to re-establish a sense of fluidity to Irish republican thinking. The movement itself has a

106.Morrison, in Collins, p. 89.
107.'Brownie', 'Revolutionary Rules'.

fertile history of thinkers; Tone, the Young Irelanders, Mitchell and Lalor through to Pearse, Connolly and Mellows. Yet this tradition, which had developed consistently since the late eighteenth century, had been halted in its tracks in the early 1920s.

The period from 1916 to 1921 was the golden age of republican struggle - a period of gallant sacrifice and military achievement. But it was swiftly followed by the disillusion of the Treaty settlement. The trauma of the civil war effectively froze the movement in a time warp which curtailed any further ideological development. Gerry Adams reckons that the movement had been intellectually decapitated by the executions of 1916 which delivered the leadership into the hands of 'non-republicans', like Collins, Griffith and de Valera, and left the IRA a traditionalist rearguard fighting against the betrayal of the ideals of 1916.[108] The more politically conscious socialist-republicans had always been present of course, but until the mid-1960s they were largely eclipsed by the traditionalists, and in any event, the bulk of them remained with the Officials when the movement split in 1969/70. While the Officials became a fully-fledged constitutional party, later in the 1980s dropping all references to its republican past and becoming simply the Workers' Party, the traditional intellectual enfeeblement of non-constitutional nationalism lived on in the Provisionals.

In many ways, the Northern radicals saw their dwindling fortunes in the mid-1970s as a symptom of the movement's general vacation of the political field to their opponents five decades earlier.[109] They wanted to reverse this trend and reinvigorate the movement. They believed this could be done by elaborating a republican doctrine that was relevant to contemporary circumstances and, therefore, capable of attracting popular support. Essentially, the radicals wanted to make the strategy evolve once again in

108.Adams, *The Politics of Irish Freedom*, p. 39.
109.*Ibid.*, p. 47.

recognition that the politico-military battlefield upon which PIRA would continue to fight would be one of constant flux, demanding different solutions in response to changing conditions. In effect, it meant lifting the republican tradition out of being just that, a tradition, and moulding it into a developing political philosophy. Needless to say, this did not mean the collapse of the republican tradition. The radicals have continued to draw on it for inspiration and legitimacy. For example, the *Green Book* stresses the Provisionals' 'direct lineal succession with the Provisional Government of 1916, the first Dail of 1919 and the second Dail of 1921.'[110] Similarly, the radicals have reiterated that the doctrines enunciated by past visionaries need to be built on, not abandoned. At the 1979 Bodenstown commemoration, Adams declared: 'The teachings of Lalor, of Connolly, McSwiney, Mellows, Pearse and Theobald Wolfe Tone, up-dated if needs be to suit today's conditions, are the teachings of the Republican Movement'.[111]

Establishing an evolving strategy meant accepting that the context of the conflict would affect the employment of the methods of republican struggle, including the military instrument. This required all aspects of the strategy be placed under constant review in order to ensure that the strategy would be analysis led and not dictated by slogans or dogmas which had been elevated to positions of explicit importance within the republican tradition to a degree where they interfered excessively with the process of strategic formulation.

To place the changes of the previous six years into context, the re-evaluation of the the Provisionals' strategy undertaken by the Northern radicals could be said to have marked the rejuvenation of the movement from a period of decline and failure. The reassessment did not, however, resolve all of the anomalies in republican thinking. Although the Northern leaders

110.Quoted in Coogan, p. 685.
111.Adams, Bodenstown Speech.

succeeded in establishing the ascendancy of their brand of radical republicanism, the new strategy remained a careful and sometimes precarious balance between innovation and tradition. The crucial aspect of the reassessment was that it brought far more coherence to the Provisionals' strategic paradigm. The evolving strategy undoubtedly produced a more sophisticated and flexible base upon which the Provisionals could conduct their campaign. It also ensured that the movement could endure, and may be prosper, into the next decade and beyond without suffering from the kind of wholesale political dislocation experienced in the mid-1970s. The essential point to be addressed, though, is now that the Provisional IRA can endure, what chance does the movement really stand of achieving its objectives with its revised strategy?

CHAPTER 7

THE CONTRADICTORY DYNAMICS OF THE TOTAL STRATEGY, 1983-1990 - THE CONTINUING MILITARY ENIGMA

The preceding chapter examined the revisions within the strategic thinking of the Provisional IRA that have taken place since the late 1970s and presented an explanation as to why, from a theoretical point of view, it can be said to represent a more satisfactory framework upon which to define the role of the military instrument. The examination of the total strategy endeavoured to explain why this represented a better strategic construct and to convey the sense of optimism which pervaded the Irish republican movement during the mid-1980s. Indeed, during the early 1980s, there seemed little to be critical about from a republican view. The reward for the strategic reassessment was a confident, politically vigorous movement which, along with a more efficient military organisation, was enjoying a degree of electoral success sufficient to cause serious worry to its adversaries in Britain and Ireland. From a nineties vantage point, the Provisionals can perhaps look back on the period from 1980 to 1983 as the halcyon years of their rejuvenated movement. The weight and complexity of the republican tradition has ensured that they cannot escape from their past difficulties quite so easily. The direction in which the new strategy has propelled the movement since the early 1980s has raised new challenges and sharpened old ones. The purpose of this chapter is to get behind the rhetoric and reasoning of the total strategy in order to analyse the extent to which the employment of the military instrument has continued to diverge from strategic norms. The chapter begins by surveying the criticisms made by some members of the old leadership against the new political emphasis in republican strategy. The analysis then explains why it has proved so difficult to co-ordinate the political and military elements of the Provisionals' campaign in the way that the present leadership would like and the negative

impact this has had on the movement's electoral fortunes. This is followed by an assessment of the persisting ideological tensions within the Provisionals' strategic thinking which continues to place a questionmark over the exact locus of authority over the military instrument. The enquiry shows how these tensions have reinforced the ambiguities in republican military thought. The chapter rounds off by demonstrating how such ambiguities have exhibited themselves through contradictory rhetorical statements and the reluctance of the Provisionals to accept the logical implications of their own strategic formula in relation to the power differential which exists between themselves and their British adversaries.

Aside from the public squabble between the radical and traditional elements in PSF in the early 1980s, it was an open secret that the upheavals in the organisation also caused a few ructions in PIRA's ranks. Personality and generational differences inevitably played their part, as did the perception of a Northern 'takeover', but dissension over practicalities centred on the relationship between the political and armed struggles. As PSF took on a more active role and rose to a position of more equal status with PIRA, it became clear that the two organisations would be in close competition for resources. The streamlining of the military organisation had reduced PIRA's operational costs, but PSF's political activities made heavy demands on the movement's finances. Bishop and Mallie have said that by 1983 the cost of the party's advice centres was in the region of £300,000 per annum while the general election campaign of that year had cost £30,000.[1] Other estimates, believed to emanate from British intelligence sources, have put the figure for the election at more like £137,000.[2] Either way, the financial burden has been considerable. Suspicion of the politically go-ahead radicals was greatest among local PIRA activists who feared that the armed struggle would

1. Bishop and Mallie, *The Provisional IRA*, p. 312.
2. See J. Adams, *The Financing of Terror* (London, 1986), p. 166.

be run down and resources diverted to cater for PSF's schemes. According to Liam Clarke, this caution was reflected in the Spring of 1983 when a meeting of ASU operatives in Belfast gave the Northern radicals two years in which to demonstrate the continued effectiveness of their approach.[3] In the intervening years there were periodic press reports of arguments within PIRA about the lack of money to maintain a guerrilla war and particularly about the diminishing level of operations in Belfast.[4] In April 1985, four activists, including Ivor Bell, a former Army Council member and delegate to the 1972 talks with William Whitelaw, were expelled from PIRA after allegedly opposing the diversion of funds away from PIRA operations to finance PSF's campaign in the up-coming May local council elections, and for subsequently trying to mobilise support against the armalite and ballot box strategy.[5] There was even a suggestion that the explosion outside Harrods in December 1983, which killed 5 people, was the work of a faction deliberately out to disrupt contacts with the political left in Britain which Adams was trying to cultivate. Speculation was raised when PIRA said that the attack was 'not authorised by the Army Council'.[6] In fact, there is little proof that this or any other attack was intended to undermine Adams' position. PIRA later claimed that its statement was meant to convey that the Harrods bomb was a mistake caused by 'extremely difficult communications' and was not a repudiation of the bombing team concerned.[7]

The PSF leadership has always been careful to stress that the 'tactic of armed struggle is of primary importance'.[8] Martin McGuinness outlined the position thus: 'We recognise the value and limitations of electoral

3. Clarke, *Broadening the Battlefield*, p. 22.
4. See M. Holland, 'Why Did IRA Attack Brighton?', *The Sunday Press*, 7 Oct. 1984.
5. 'Provo Split', *New Hibernia*, May 1985. See also Adams, *The Financing of Terror*, p. 165.
6. PIRA Statement, reprinted in *The Irish Times*, 19 Dec. 1983.
7. Interview with PIRA spokesperson, *AP/RN*, 5 Jan. 1984.
8. Adams, *The Politics of Irish Freedom*, p. 64.

success. We recognise that only a disciplined armed struggle by the IRA will end British rule.'[9] Outright hostility within PIRA towards PSF appears to have been sporadic rather than co-ordinated and therefore not symptomatic of any widespread feeling of antagonism against the radicals. By 1986 any major doubts within PIRA had been sufficiently dispelled for an Army Council spokesman to announce that the movement 'has overcome many of the genuine fears that increased political activity would lead to a downgrading of the armed struggle.'[10]

Tensions within PSF did not dissipate so rapidly. Problems grew with evidence that PSF had reached its electoral peak in Northern Ireland. After three years of steady gains at the polls, the party's vote in the 1984 European election slipped to 91,476, down 11,000 votes on its performance in the 1983 general election. The decline was confirmed by the local elections in 1985. Despite winning a respectable 59 council seats, PSF's showing fell to 11.8% of the vote (75,686 first preference votes). Adams described the 1984 result a 'useful injection of reality'.[11] It was clear that the talk of overtaking the SDLP had been far too optimistic. Having reached this stage, the PSF leadership now set its sights on electoral expansion into the Irish Republic. Ever since the early 1980s it had been PSF's intention to campaign on a 32-county basis, but events in Northern Ireland had, until then, absorbed its attentions. In the South, the party remained organisationally sluggish and devoid of real leadership. The situation was compounded by a widespread perception of PSF in the South as a single issue fringe group. Morrison admitted that PSF had 'to recognise... that the vast majority of people in the 26 counties consider the institutions of the state as being legitimate.'[12] This meant that if PSF was to be of any relevance

9. M. McGuinness, 'We Will Never be Slaves Again', *AP/RN*, 28 June 1984.
10. Quoted in 'The Ballot and the Bomb', *Magill*, July 1986.
11. Interview with G. Adams, *AP/RN*, 21 June 1984.
12. Interview with D. Morrison, *Magill*, Sept. 1984.

in the South it would need to lift its policy of abstention from the Irish Dail, Leinster House, and campaign in the mainstream of Southern politics. With memories of the 1969/70 split still sharp, it was an emotive issue, especially for older republicans who believed that abstentionism formed the cornerstone of the Provisionals' identity. PSF's leaders carefully prepared their ground. A PIRA Convention, held between September and October 1986, the first since 1970, renewed its commitment to the 'armed overthrow of British rule in Ireland', and endorsed the radicals' plans by amending PIRA's constitution to allow the organisation to back non-abstentionist candidates.'[13]

The PIRA Convention's support bolstered the PSF leadership when the motion to drop abstention came up for discussion at the 1986 Ard-Fheis. Following an emotional, and sometimes acrimonious debate, the motion received the two-thirds majority necessary to permit the taking of seats at Leinster House. After the vote was taken, a number of those opposed to the change, amongst them O'Conaill and O'Bradaigh, walked out to form a new party, Republican Sinn Fein (RSF). RSF officially based its opposition on moralistic grounds about upholding allegiance to the 1916 Proclamation, the declaration of independence by the first Dail in 1919 and the non-recognition of 'British created institutions', which included the Dublin parliament.'[14] The dimensions of the split should not be over-played. The scale of the radicals' victory in the abstention debate, 429 votes to 161, was emphatic and displayed a real shift in opinion throughout the movement. In any case, it was widely known beforehand that a traditionalist rump would be unlikely to accept any decision to end abstentionism.

What became of RSF and the controversy over the split are matters for the historical record and of no immediate concern here. However, for all

13. *AP/RN*, 16 Oct. 1986.
14. *Republican Bulletin* (RSF), 2 Nov. 1986.

RSF's dogmatism and seeming concern for the preservation of the idealism of the past over progress in the present, did not mean that some of the more practical arguments RSF levelled against the Provisionals' electoral policy were invalid. Many of those who objected to the end of abstentionism could see the benefit that elections had brought in undermining the policy of criminalisation and in restricting the SDLP's room for manoeuvre, but their view was that the moment they gave recognition to the Southern state the movement would be fatally compromised. Inextricably they would be drawn into the system of wheeler-dealing which would eventually result in the implicit acceptance of all the panoply of the state they despised; the police, the courts, security co-operation with Britain etc.. O'Bradaigh put it this way: 'They will be signing their own extinction as revolutionaries not because they want to but because it cannot be otherwise.'[15] The bottom line was that electoral participation and an armed campaign were incompatible, as O'Bradaigh argued: 'You cannot ride two horses at the same time.'[16]

One of the risks of dropping abstentionism is that once the Southern state is recognised as having legitimacy where electoral participation is permissible, while the North is regarded as irreformable where armed struggle is a necessity, then PSF is in danger of creating two different parties to suit two different political systems. In effect, a *de facto* recognition of partition. Naturally, the radicals deny these accusations. 'We need to keep our republican gut' and 'must never lose sight of our national objectives,' Adams reminded his audience at the 1986 Ard-Fheis.[17] The radicals' line, as expressed by *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, was that: 'Leinster House *does* corrupt. It corrupts corruptible people... the weak and

15. Quoted in G. Barry, 'The Bullet or the Ballot?', *The Sunday Tribune*, 26 Oct. 1986.
16. Quoted in 'In the Shadow of the Gunmen', *The Guardian*, 28 Jan. 1989.
17. G. Adams, 'Presidential Address', in *PSF, The Politics of Revolution* (Dublin, 1986), p. 13.

vain, the insincere and the gombeen. It cannot corrupt a revolutionary.'[18] But this, as the opponents point out, is self-refuting. If one professes to be a revolutionary who will refuse to participate in the political process, then why bother taking seats in parliament? 'I cannot see what they would do if they were elected to Leinster House', pondered one pro-abstentionist councillor before the 1986 Ard-Fheis.'[19] At the time of writing, we have yet to find out.

Whatever the impediment to PSF's political progress, abstention had been a vehicle for reducing some of the anomalies within republican thinking. Abstention was the hand-maiden of absolutism as it ensured that republican ideals remained untainted by influences in the wider political world. Once this principle was banished, republican ideology theoretically became more vulnerable to dilution by outside forces. Adams knew all along that there would be difficulties in the Provisionals' new approach. In 1983 he admitted: 'there are contradictions between our struggle and the political structure in the same way there are contradictions in Irish society'.[20] Adams was perhaps more prescient than he might have wished, because the evolution of the military instrument from the early 1980s largely reflects the movement's attempts to grapple with the increasing rhetorical and practical contradictions that have emerged following the adoption of a higher political profile.

The Armalite versus the Ballot Box

When the Provisionals abolished abstention in 1986 they claimed that simple vote-catching was not their specific intention. They recognised that support for violence would dissuade many people from voting for PSF. This was

18. *AP/RN*, 6 Nov. 1986.
19. Quoted in 'The Armalite and the Dail', *The Sunday Tribune*, 14 Sept. 1986.
20. Quoted in E. Moloney, 'Gunmen Were Doing Their Duty - Adams', *The Irish Times*, 19 Dec. 1983.

not seen as a barrier but as an opportunity both to develop the party organisation and to get their message across by using election campaigns and parliamentary seats as political platforms. As *An Phoblacht/Republican News* elucidated, the electoral intervention was seen as consistent with their overall plans:

> Initially our solidarity with the armed struggle may cost us support among some sections of the non-republican populace. However, rather than compromise or be evasive, republicans must explain the origins and correctness of physical force. We can then learn to live without the support of those to whom the armed struggle is an insuperable difficulty. It is something we have assessed. But we will also educate many into republicanism, into our analysis of the crisis in Ireland, into supporting republicanism and the republican struggle.[21]

Nevertheless, constant exhortations, not least from Adams himself, 'to move into the mainstream of political relevancy,'[22] has required there to be some compromise between the armed and political sides of the struggle. It is no good entering the electoral arena only to end up with a miniscule number of votes. Poor performances would hardly be consistent for an energetic organisation which believed itself capable of breaking the mould of Irish politics. In order not to alienate potential sympathisers it has proved necessary for the armed struggle to be 'acceptable to the people on whose behalf it is carried out.'[23] Tables 1 and 2 (pages 338 and 339) demonstrate how, since the late 1970s, PIRA has concentrated its attacks on security forces personnel. This has been accompanied by a corresponding decrease in the number of bombings in urban areas and against commercial property which place civilians at greatest risk. This is reflected in both tables in the decline in civilian fatalities as a percentage of the total number of deaths recorded up to the mid-1980s. Table 3 (page 340) indicates that there is little in PIRA's operational profile to signify that the level of attacks has been adjusted to coincide with the elections which took

21. *AP/RN*, 6 Nov. 1986.
22. Adams, *The Politics of Irish Freedom*, p. 152.
23. McGuinness, 'We Will Never be Slaves Again'.

place in the period. There are no depreciations in the rate of explosions or deaths of security force personnel in the run up to, or appreciations following, each of the elections concerned. Only in May 1985, the month in which local elections were held in Northern Ireland, is there a dip in the figures, but this is insufficient to establish any trend. The bulk of the statistical information up to the mid-1980s suggests, that with the exception of the hunger strike elections in 1981 when there was a reduction in the level of operations, the refinements in the employment of the military instrument apply *only* to PIRA's targeting policy.

One explanation for the absence of any co-operation between PIRA and PSF during elections could be that having reached an electoral ceiling in Northern Ireland, the movement feels that there is limited political mileage to be gained in further constraining PIRA's operations to facilitate PSF's electoral progress. PSF's vote now appears stable at about 80,000 to 90,000 votes. If this is the case, then there seems little to confirm the suspicions of the traditionalists that the military campaign will become subordinate to the needs of the political struggle. Although the primacy of the military arm does not appear under threat, certain intellectual incongruities have emerged. This has been most noticeable in PSF's attitude towards the Anglo-Irish Agreement, or Hillsborough Accord, concluded between the British and Irish governments in November 1985. The main provision of the Accord, in so far as it affected nationalists in Northern Ireland, has been to grant Dublin a consultative role in the affairs of the province. Although PSF opposed the Agreement as yet another doomed attempt at an internal settlement, Adams stated in late 1985, that the Agreement's introduction had shown that the British could be moved by republican pressure: 'The equation is therefore a simple one: support for Sinn Fein equals concessions from the

Table 1: Yearly Civilian Fatalities* and Percentage of Total Fatalities Each Year, 1969-1985

Year	Number	% of total fatalities
1969	13	86.7
1970	17	68.0
1971	93	53.8
1972	238	50.1
1973	127	50.4
1974	143	65.3
1975	171	69.8
1976	213	72.0
1977	47	42.3
1978	31	41.3
1979	27	25.0
1980	34	43.6
1981	34	30.9
1982	31	32.3
1983	28	35.9
1984	16	25.4
1985	15	28.3

*Excludes deaths of paramilitary suspects, political activists, elected representatives, prison officers, former members of security forces and unclassified deaths.

Compiled from data contained in Irish Information Partnership (IIP), *Irish Information Agenda* (London, 1987), Table B1viii, p. 4.

Statistical source for all tables: RUC information.

Table 2: Yearly Security Force and Civilian Fatalities Caused by Republican Paramilitaries and Percentage of Total Fatalities in Each Year, 1979-1986

Security Force Fatalities

Year	Number	% of Total
1979	59	54.6
1980	27	34.6
1981	43	39.1
1982	41	42.7
1983	34	43.6
1984	28	44.4
1985	29	54.7
1986	24	45.3

Civilian Fatalities

Year	Number	% of Total
1979	19	17.6
1980	20	25.6
1981	22	20.0
1982	27	28.1
1983	15	19.2
1984	10	15.9
1985	13	24.5
1986	14	26.4

Compiled from IIP, Table B1ii, pp. 3-4.

Table 3: Monthly Fatalities of Security Forces and Monthly Rate of Explosions, 1983-86

i) Monthly Fatalities of Security Forces

	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	June	July	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Total
1983	3	3	2	3	2	2a	4	1	1	5	7	1	34
1984	5	1	3	2	8	2b	2	2	1	2	0	1	29
1985	0	13	3	1	4c	2	0	0	2	0	3	2	30
1986	3d	2	2	2	4	0	7	1	0	3	1	0	24

ii) Monthly Rate of Explosions

1983	5	15	19	12	19	46a	23	18	44	17	26	22	266
1984	26	27	22	21	15	12b	16	19	13	11	4	7	193
1985	7	11	8	14	4c	11	14	32	32	8	5	17	163
1986	13d	7	5	13	15	7	5	25	9	26	22	26	172

iii) Monthly Rate of Explosions of Known Republican Paramilitary Origin, 1984-1985

1984	26	25	22	20	15	12b	16	19	13	11	4	7	190
1985	7	11	8	14	4c	11	14	31	8	8	5	17	162
1986	13d	7	5	12	15	6	4	25	25	25	22	26	169

Compiled from IIP, Table B7iii, p. 1.

a)Month of Westminster General Election.

b)Month of European Community Elections.

c)Month of Local Elections, Northern Ireland.

d)Month of Unionist (anti-Anglo-Irish Agreement) By-elections.

British.'[24] This argument was duly incorporated into PSF's campaign literature: 'Sinn Fein recognises that the Hillsborough Agreement has come about as a direct result of the electoral advances of Sinn Fein and the successes of the Republican Movement.'[25] This represented a straight trawl for votes with little regard for doctrinal consistency. By trying to claim credit for concessions to improve a system which the movement has always said needs to be destroyed comes dangerously close to undermining the argument that the Northern state is irreformable. There was some internal criticism of PSF's 'confused postion of on the one hand opposing the Hillsborough Agreement but at the same time trying to claim credit for the benefits which might arise from it.'[26] This attempt to play it both ways was probably one reason why PSF failed to stimulate its electoral fortunes. After all, why should nationalists who favour the Agreement vote for PSF which is, at heart, opposed to the Agreement when others like the SDLP are wholly supportive? In the British general election of June 1987, PSF remained more or less static with 11.4% of the poll in Northern Ireland, while in the Southern election in February the same year, PSF received a truly dismal 1.9%.

The awkward balance of maintaining a revolutionary party on the one hand, while trying to juggle with the politics of popularity with the other, is one previously unknown area into which PSF has been led since its decision to enter electoral politics. PIRA's emphasis on attacking members of the security forces is part of the process to make the movement more palatable to voters, as it is assumed that such attacks can be passed off as legitimate military targets. Such intentions count for little if attacks go wrong and end up killing large numbers of civilians as has happened since 1987. The most notorious of recent times was the Enniskillen bombing on

24. Interview with G. Adams in PSF, *The Hillsborough Deal: Stepping Stone or Mill Stone?* (PSF pamphlet), Dec. 1985.
25. PSF, *Sinn Fein Policy Document*, (Dublin, 1987), p. 14.
26. 'Denis the Menace', 'Needs of the Struggle', *Irish Bheag*, (internal PSF discussion journal), No. 4, Nov. 1987, p. 3.

Remembrance Day in November 1987 which killed 11 Protestants. The sectarianism evident in the choice of target and the overtones of mendacity in trying to blame the explosion on British Army scanning equipment, compounded a public relations disaster for the Provisionals. The political effect of PIRA's mistakes has been to restrict PSF's capacity to expand beyond its core of support, as one PIRA spokesman commented after Enniskillen: 'Our central base can take a hell of a lot of jolting and crises. But the outer reaches are just totally devastated.'[27] In 1988 civilian fatalities comprised 31% of PIRA's victims. They rose to 39% in 1989.[28] The cost in terms of lost support for PSF was revealed in the local elections of May 1989. Although PSF's share of the vote at 11.3% was only 0.1% down on the 1987 general election, the party received 6500 fewer votes than the 1985 local election and lost 16 of its council seats. PSF councillor, Mitchel McLaughlin, acknowledged that 'IRA operations that went wrong did have an effect because in a sense Sinn Fein is held accountable at local level for all aspects of the republican struggle.'[29] This sort of statement is indicative of a degree of PSF irritation with the regularity of PIRA's errors and well illustrates the tension between the armed struggle and PSF's desire to maximise its electoral potential. On a number of occasions since the early 1980s Adams has reproved PIRA for its operational laxity. Following the European election in 1984 he warned:

> ...there are varying degrees of tolerance within the nationalist electorate for aspects of the armed struggle... I think there is a need to refer to what I said at the 1983 Ard-Fheis. That is that revolutionary force must be controlled and disciplined so that it is clearly seen as a symbol of our people's resistance.[30]

Adams has never publicly condemned any PIRA operation, but his criticisms of PIRA have become less coded since the late 1980s as the frequency

27. Quoted in D. McKittrick, 'IRA's Toll of Civilian Deaths Grows Despite Public Stance', *The Independent*, 13 April 1989.
28. *Fortnight*, March 1990.
29. Interview with M. McLaughlin, *AP/RN*, 25 May 1989.
30. Interview with G. Adams, *AP/RN*, 21 June 1984.

of mistakes continued to grow and their negative impact on PSF's electoral prospects became evident. During his speech to the 1989 Ard-Fheis, he addressed some of his remarks to members of PIRA: 'You have a massive responsibility. At times the fate of the struggle is in your hands. You have to be careful and careful again.'[31] The problem for PSF is that PIRA does not actually dissent from anything Adams has said. According to a member of the GHQ staff: 'We will always be striving to place the struggle on ground which republicans can unhesitatingly, and without great difficulty, defend.'[32] The main reasons for the high rate of mistakes are historical and structural. Traditionally, PIRA units, particularly those in border areas, have enjoyed a large degree of autonomy, more so since the introduction of the cell structure. ASUs are able to plan their actions with little reference to the higher echelons of PIRA's command. This was probably a strong factor in the Enniskillen bombing. Being an illegal conspiritorial organisation, PIRA finds it hard to train recruits and test equipment while financial constraints prevent it from obtaining the most up-to-date and reliable weaponry. As a consequence, there is an in-built propensity for mistakes to occur.[33]

The inherent risk of mistakes is one reason why the internal opposition theory does not measure up. There remain some doubts over the wisdom of PSF's approach but there is no indication that these are prevalent enough to suggest that blunders have been manufactured by factional dissent to sabotage PSF's political line. This explanation also helps to dispel the idea that PIRA operations are designed to undermine specific diplomatic initiatives. There is a tendency, in both the British and Irish press, to attribute motives of political timing to each major action. For example, the attack on the Conservative Party Conference at Brighton in October 1984 was

31. G. Adams, *Presidential Address*, 84th Ard-Fheis, (Dublin, 1989), p. 4.
32. 'IRA Interview', *AP/RN*, 26 Jan. 1989.
33. E. Moloney, 'Mistaken Strategy', *Fortnight*, May 1989.

said to be intended to destroy the prospects for increased co-operation in a forthcoming summit between Margaret Thatcher and Irish Prime Minister, Garret Fitzgerald.[34] Such attributions are highly speculative and credit PIRA with a sense of omnipresence which it does not possess. PIRA is a small organisation, possibly 300 activists at most, which has to function in conditions of strict security. Attacks can take weeks, if not months, to plan. Many of them have to be called off. For example, PIRA admitted that out of 18 bombing missions carried out between February and May 1983, 8 had to be aborted either because the bombs failed to detonate properly or because they were located by the security forces.[35] In any case, spectacular operations, whether they go wrong or not, have tended to spur rather than hinder Anglo-Irish co-operation against PIRA. The Enniskillen bombing, for instance, enabled the Irish government to push a contentious extradition bill through the Dail. It is opportunism, not political coincidence, which can be said to be the guiding motive behind PIRA's attacks.

Fundamentally, the long war approach explicitly rejects such notions as offensives or political timing. Ever since the introduction of the long war concept in the late 1970s, the aim has been to sustain a continuous level of attacks irrespective of political developments within or between the governments of Britain and Ireland. The following extract from an interview with a PIRA spokesman illustrates this point. It refers to two series of bombing and shooting incidents conducted by PIRA in Northern Ireland, the first in November 1978 and the second in April 1979, the month before the British general election.

> These attacks [the November 1978 attacks] were inaccurately described by the media as part of a winter offensive, as if we were trying to realise a short term goal or aim. This was not so. Similarly, what is happening now is not a pre-election blitz but is just a period of concerted

34. See for example, *The Guardian*, *The Irish Press*, *The Irish News*, 13 Oct. 1984 and *The Sunday Press*, 14 Oct. 1984.
35. 'A Constant Level of Resistance', *Iris*, July 1983.

activity in our overall struggle to destabilise British rule in Ireland.[36]

There are two deductions one can make both from an examination of PIRA's operational profile and from statements like those above. Firstly, PIRA is unable to fight to prescription, that is, to make its attacks coincide with individual political events, and secondly, it is impossible to fight an antiseptic, voter-friendly war. The second point in particular highlights the underlying tension within the armalite and ballot box strategy. Can PSF credibly campaign on a range of economic and social issues, like houses, jobs, investment, health, while PIRA helps destroy them? There have been two telling incidents that underline this query, both involved PIRA bombing attacks on the Andersonstown Road RUC station, West Belfast, in which a number of surrounding houses were damaged. The first, in June, 1983 happened the night before the Westminster election, leaving PSF activists to answer for PIRA's action and advise residents on state compensation. Apparently, when Adams was canvassing the following morning he saw the bombing unit returning from the mission and shook his fist in anger at their car.[37] The second incident occurred the following year while PSF was leading a delegation to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to complain about housing conditions in West Belfast.[38] These sorts of embarrassments do mark out certain lines of divergence between PIRA and PSF. They stem from differing perceptions rather than elementary disagreements over the movement's direction. As Ed Moloney points out, being at the sharp military end of the struggle, PIRA is inclined to see operations which go wrong and kill civilians as technical mistakes, resulting from faulty equipment, inadequate warning times and so on. PSF, on the other hand, tends to see such actions as conceptually flawed, believing that operations should never

36. Quoted in 'Unprecedented Casualties', *AP/RN*, 21 April 1979.
37. Clarke, p. 227.
38. 'Big Test For Ballot Box Supporters', *New Hibernia*, April 1985.

be carried out in areas, like towns and cities, where there is a high risk to civilians.[39] For example, when asked in an interview whether he could really have been surprised that the Enniskillen bomb had caused civilian deaths after it had been placed in a position where civilians had always congregated, Adams replied: 'I think that was the stupid mistake, planting it there in the first place, the fact that it was a memorial service, the fact that all fatalities bar one were civilians'.[40] It is clear that PSF does not count the cost of mistakes as missed opportunities to hit the security forces but in terms of damage to its political reputation and election prospects. On the other side of the coin, PIRA has occasionally seen the restrictions it feels obliged to observe as posing a reverse propaganda threat. For example, in 1985 PIRA launched a series of bombings against Belfast city centre. PIRA felt that the British had used the reduced level of violence in urban areas as a 'propaganda platform' to attract investment and promote a 'facade of normality'. The intention of the bombings, as the Belfast Brigade's statement claiming responsibility for the attacks read, was to destroy these claims: 'There is no "normality". Such propaganda claims are false and today's attack is a potent demonstration of our determination to continue our struggle against the British colonial presence wherever and whenever the opportunity presents itself.'[41]

Sentiments such as those expressed in the quote above stand in direct contravention to the political interests of PSF. Adams is aware of this difficulty. In 1987 he reminded PIRA that it had 'a major responsibility to ensure that the armed struggle was geared to republican goals.' He continued: 'Its when the IRA, as in Enniskillen, omits to take this into account that tragedies take place.'[42] Yet organisational, historical and tempera-

39. Moloney, 'Mistaken Strategy'.
40. Interview with G. Adams, *The Last Post*, Dec. 1987.
41. 'IRA Shatter "Normality" Facade', *AP/RN*, 20 June 1985.
42. Interview with G. Adams, *The Irish Press*, 23 Nov. 1987.

mental factors have shown PIRA's inability to fine tune the armed struggle to advance republican goals in the manner which Adams suggests. It is precisely this point, the fact that Adams and PSF do not have any direct influence over PIRA's operational planning, which emphasises the central problem for Irish republican strategy, a theme which has been under constant scrutiny in this analysis, the issue of political control over the military instrument.

The Contradictions Over Political Control of the Military Instrument

The question of political control over the use of violence has been suggested in previous chapters as a major reason why republican violence has sometimes been misapplied in the past. With the advent of the total strategy and the rise of PSF to a position of equivalence with PIRA, one might have expected some of the problems which existed in this area to start moving towards resolution. As the military instrument is now considered incapable of shouldering the republican struggle alone, and therefore, to be accompanied by increased political activity, it follows that there should be some co-ordination of military and political means in order to optimise the level of resistance. This raises the larger question of how this co-ordination should be formed and controlled? The foundation of strategic theory is that war is an expression of political purpose to achieve certain ends through violence. The attainment of the political goal remains the paramount concern in war. Policy will, therefore, affect the employment of the military instrument to ensure there is maximum movement towards the political objective. In theory, this should mean that the PSF leadership oversees all aspects of the struggle. Although PSF would not necessarily take any interest in day-to-day military decisions, it would define the general thrust of military policy by laying down the boundaries of permissible

action in war. PSF would thus be able to instruct PIRA on what military objectives it should seek and when to refrain from actions which may inhibit the advance towards the overall goal.

The complication here is in trying to establish the exact relationship between PIRA and PSF. Ever since 1919 Sinn Fein and the IRA have maintained that they are both separate organisations which share the same aspirations. Mutual agreement on aims, according to one PSF pamphlet in 1973: 'does not mean Sinn Fein has any control or say in Army policy and *vice versa*. Sinn Fein is simply a political organisation whose policy is the establishment of a 32-county socialist republic.'[43] Similarly, in the late 1980s, Adams declared: 'There isn't any organic relationship... Sinn Fein supports the right in particular circumstances to take up armed resistance.'[44] Such claims do give some ground for scepticism. One might ask what was the rumpus over abstention all about? Why did the PSF leadership need to reassure its members that ending abstention would not lead to any diminution of the armed struggle? If there are no formal ties with PIRA, then PSF is in no position to answer for PIRA, as no PSF decision on abstention could by itself alter PIRA's commitment to violence? The fact that PSF does answer for PIRA, that PIRA statements are issued through PSF's offices and that PSF seems well versed in the vocabulary of PIRA strategy, implies a link which goes beyond mere coincidence of objectives. In particular, there have been numerous allegations of dual membership, though, as yet, none legally proved.

Uncertainty over the nature of the connections between PIRA and PSF leads to the more serious accusation that PSF is not only linked, but subordinate to PIRA. Historically, there is no doubt that the IRA has been the senior member in the partnership. Adams denies the 'monkey and organ

43. 'Why Sinn Fein?', *The Volunteer* (PSF, Lurgan), 2 Feb. 1973.
44. Interview with G. Adams, *Magill*, Aug. 1988.

grinder relationship with the IRA.' 'The suggestion that Sinn Fein would be running off to the IRA to ratify tactical and political decisions is nonsense.'[45] Yet it was the *Staff Report* of 1977 which stated: 'Sinn Fein should come under *Army organisers* at all levels... Sinn Fein should be radicalised *(under Army direction)*' [author's italics]. This testifies to the fact that the modern PSF organisation had its original terms of reference shaped by the Army Council. Although this does not prove that PSF continues to be submissive, there have been instances in the recent past which indicate that PSF still occasionally bows to PIRA's influence. For example, Bishop and Mallie say that in 1985 the Belfast Brigade engineered the selection of their favoured candidate, Alex Maskey, for a Belfast council by-election, over Adams' first choice.[46] One might also point to the terms PIRA appear to have extracted in return for endorsing the abolition of abstention, which included the over-turning of a pro-abortion motion passed in 1985 and a general toning down in PSF's socialist rhetoric.[47]

It is possible that the denials of association are mere legal niceties to prevent PSF's proscription. It is also clear that over the past ten years PSF has moved out of PIRA's shadow and gained greater control over its own affairs, though whether this has made it wholly independent of PIRA is still a matter for debate. The closest that the available evidence permits us to say is that there are probably a number of unofficial links and associations, possibly based on personal contacts, which result in a degree of mutual understanding and informal co-operation. Certainly, the distinctly *ad hoc* fashion in which PSF believes it can rely on PIRA's assistance, lends weight to this interpretation. In hoping that PIRA would help PSF at election times by reducing the number of operations, Morrison has said: 'We would like to think that the IRA would appreciate when to take an expedient

45. *Ibid.*.
46. Bishop and Mallie, p. 304.
47. Clarke, p. 231.

holiday for a week.'[48] At other times, Adams has sought to emphasise PSF's separation by distancing the party from PIRA: 'Sinn Fein does not unambiguously support the IRA, we support their right to engage in armed struggle. No-one should give unambiguous support to any organisation or institution.'[49]

Either way, separate or subordinate, PSF does not appear to receive the close co-operation it may wish from PIRA, as evidenced by the failure of Adams' strictures on avoiding mistakes to modify PIRA's operating procedures to any noticeable extent. Nor, from the information contained in Table 3, does PIRA seem to have paid much attention to Morrison's call for undeclared ceasefires come elections. The political damage that this lack of co-ordination can inflict on PSF's progress, and the movement's prospects generally, is immense. The Harrods bomb, and later the Brighton bombing, did a great deal to erode the contacts which PSF had been trying to build up with the British left. Outright support from the broad left could never have been expected so long as PIRA's violence continued, but the sympathy of some on the far left could be preserved if PIRA waged a restrained campaign. Although the far left never extended its influence into government during the 1980s, which seemed a possibility early in the decade, such contacts could still have proved a useful bridgehead into British politics. Clumsy operations like Harrods have placed sympathisers in a moral quandary over whether to support a movement that carries out operations which kill civilians. The Brighton bomb, on the other hand, had the effect of strengthening the Conservative government's image, something guaranteed to bring the Provisionals into contempt in the eyes of virtually all those on the left of British politics.[50]

The lack of any apparent co-ordination between PSF initiatives and PIRA

48. Quoted in P. Bishop, 'A Gunmen Cleans Up His Act', *The Observer*, 17 April 1983.
49. Interview with Adams, *The Last Post*.
50. See K. Toolis, 'The British Left After Brighton', *Fortnight*, Nov. 1985.

operations, has helped squander opportunities to expand the movement's base of sympathisers in Great Britain. In Northern Ireland the consequences could also be acute. In the by-elections of 23 January 1986, prompted by the mass resignations of Unionist MPs in protest against the Hillsborough Agreement, PSF contested 4 constituencies (Fermanagh and South Tyrone, Mid-Ulster, Newry and Armagh and South Down) and received only 6.6% of the vote. A contributary element in PSF's poor performance appeared to lie in the fact that for the previous year PIRA had been engaged in a campaign of attacks against RUC stations and British Army barracks, in the main using highly inaccurate home-made mortars which invariably damaged neighbouring houses. In the 8 months leading up to the by-elections, PIRA had carried out 21 attacks on such establishments. Nearly all occurred in the four constituencies in which PSF chose to stand.[51]

The evidence presented above suggests that there is little political guidance of the military instrument, either because PSF is a subsidiary arm of PIRA, or more likely, because PSF is a semi-detached organisation without any direct say in the use of violence. If this is the case, then it blows away the entire rationale concerning the armed struggle's relationship with the total strategy. How can the armed struggle be considered merely as one tactic to be used or discarded in accordance with its functionality if there is no political control over the application of force in the first place? Therefore, if we take people like Adams at their word, and accept that there are no formal PSF links with PIRA, then why should anyone bother listening to such a minor party and fellow traveller of the Provisional IRA? There is no point in talking to PSF about political settlements or ceasefires if it has no influence, apart from moral suasion, over PIRA. Even if PSF wanted an end to violence there is nothing it can do to ensure PIRA would stop. Instead, the regulation of the military instrument appears to remain in the

51. See 'Guerrilla War', *AP/RN*, 18 Sept. 1986. See also Clarke, p. 232.

hands of the shadowy Army Council which is free to employ violence wherever it so chooses unaccountable to anyone beyond its own organisation.

The confusion at the heart of Provisional strategy leaves a series of questions about the movement's underlying attitude towards the practice of violence. Is the inability to impose control over the armed struggle, for all the talk of calculating it on the basis of its utility, symptomatic of a continuing romantic attachment to physical force? Adams pronounces the armed struggle to be a 'morally correct form of resistance.' He also sees it as an effective form of resistance:

> ...the British Government rarely listens to the force of argument. It understands only the argument of force... Armed struggle, however, is not merely a defensive reaction by an oppressed people. It sets the political agenda. Thus armed struggle can advance the overall struggle to the advantage of those in whose interest it is waged.[52]

This combination of moral approval and assertion, though rarely explanation, of the instrumentality of the armed struggle, intimates at an emotional affinity with the use of force. Physical force is not only one of the most important unifying factors in the movement, it is really the only feature which preserves the Provisionals' notoriety and identity. Indeed, Adams has emphasised the commitment to the armed struggle as a means of differentiating the Provisionals from their rivals in the Officials: 'For anyone who has eyes to see, it is clear that the Sticky leadership had abandoned the armed struggle as a form of resistance to British rule... For our part, this leadership has been active in the longest phase of resistance to the British presence. Our record speaks for itself.'[53] When the Provisionals use the armed struggle in this manner to distinguish themselves from their political rivals, it casts doubt over whether the efficacy of physical force can ever be seriously challenged under the aegis of the total strategy without causing huge internal disruption. It suggests that force is still regarded as an

52. Adams, *Presidential Address* (1989), pp. 3-4.
53. Adams, 'Presidential Address' (1986), in PSF, *The Politics of Revolution*, p. 11.

unimpeachable facet of republican resistance. A contribution to the confidential PSF journal, *Iris Bheag*, a good guide to the feelings of local activists, argued: 'Without the war there would be no cutting edge... This means calling off the armed struggle is not an option open to the Irish revolution.'[54] Such views, assuming they are prevalent in PSF, exhibit an air of permanence regarding the military instrument. It is possible to speculate whether the loyalty to the campaign of violence professed by PSF's leaders is genuine or simply an implicit admission that they have no authority over PIRA and that the military instrument is, therefore, inherently uncontrollable. McGuinness once said: 'Sinn Fein would never consider any suggestion that it should dictate operational conditions to the men and women who engage in the legitimate armed struggle against the forces of British imperialism,'[55] thus leaving open the question as to whether this was a statement of voluntary restraint on the part of PSF, or merely, as seems more probable, confirmation of a pre-existing fact?

The questions posed are difficult to answer with precision due to legal smoke-screens and clashing or insufficient evidence. The commitment to violence no doubt remains a complex mixture of motives, and with all the emotional energy invested in the symbol of physical force in the republican tradition it is perhaps too much to expect even the radical politico-Provisionals to treat the subject on a purely practical level. Yet the distinct impression persists that there is still no meaningful political management of the use of violence. Although PIRA may not willfully ignore PSF's advice on military matters, it is evident that PIRA is free to reject it, if it so wishes. Along with differing organisational structures, the traditionally dominant role of the IRA over Sinn Fein and the difficulty of imposing firm control over local ASUs, it is patent that PIRA remains independent of any

54. Sean Doite, 'After Enniskillen', *Iris Bheag*, No. 5, Dec. 1987, p. 13.
55. McGuinness, 'We Will Never Be Slaves Again'.

external authority. On more than one occasion this has been openly stated. In 1983, for example, a member of PIRA's leadership proclaimed: 'The military struggle will not slow down to relate to Sinn Fein's political activity. If anything, subject to logistical considerations, the war is likely to be stepped up'.[56] More implicit assertions of autonomy from political constraints lived on through the 1980s in PIRA's continuing tendency to issue belligerently worded statements to 'carry on the struggle through 1984 until victory'[57] and by emphasising that the 'armed struggle will continue and continue while finding ways of intensifying the war.'[58]

The question of military autonomy has been stressed as a recurring problem in Irish republican strategy and was explained in some detail in Chapter 3. PIRA is by no means unique in comparison with other small conspiritorial insurgent groups, especially those which sprang up in Western Europe during the 1970s. However, the lack of a definite political-military nexus within republican strategy underlines the curious nature of the movement with regard to the degree to which the military arm has consistently prevailed over political considerations and continues to regulate the republican struggle. To reiterate what Adams says, the armed struggle 'sets the political agenda'. But can the agenda itself be regulated? The balance of the evidence suggests that this is not possible as the military instrument under PIRA alone cannot be guaranteed as a functional element in war to be deployed in a measured way under politically controlled conditions.

Contradictions in the Rhetoric of British Withdrawal

The issue of political control is not something which exists in the abstract as a debating point for strategic theorists. Failure to accurately define the role of force in the political process can prevent the military

56. Interview with PIRA spokesperson, *Magill*, July 1983.
57. Interview with PIRA spokesperson, *AP/RN*, 5 Jan. 1984.
58. 'Until Britain Tires', *Sceal*, (PSF, Newry), 29 Sept. 1988.

instrument from being properly directed to achieve appropriate ends. At worst, this can lead to the indiscriminate application of violence in a manner which can hinder the attainment of objectives. Because low intensity warfare strategies often seek to use military engagements as a means of pressure rather than physical denial, their practitioners have to exercise considerable political caution in order to avoid both the wastage of scarce military resources and the provocation of enemy counter-measures which restrict the freedom to operate. Although the contemporary Provisional movement may not fit the worst case example, the lack of effective political stewardship of PIRA still makes it difficult to discern the exact purpose of armed force in relation to the main objective of effecting the removal of Northern Ireland from the UK.

The chief task in resolving this difficulty lies in trying to detect, from private and public pronouncements, the decisive point at which the Provisionals believe military pressure should be applied to get the British to concede to their will. PIRA's *Green Book* appears explicit. It categorises the 'main enemy' to be 'the establishment', which is defined as 'all those who have a vested interest in maintaining the present *status quo* in politicians, media, judiciary, certain business elements and the Brit war machine comprising the Brit Army, the UDR, RUC, Screws [prison officers], Civilian Searchers.'[59] The interests which this group has in perpetuating the *status quo* is seen to range variously from personal gain and economic exploitation to the politicians' obsession with the Russian threat and the desire to protect British security interests on the Western flank.[60] On a number of occasions the Provisionals have tried to be more specific about the nature of their political enemy. In 1981 O'Bradaigh proclaimed: 'What's meant by the expression "England" is the English ruling classes who have

59. Quoted in Coogan, pp. 691-692.
60. See Adams, *The Politics of Irish Freedom*, pp. 96-97.

dominated and exploited the Irish people, and indeed, much of the world in their time and have also exploited their own working people as is clear from those who wish to study it.'[61] According to PIRA's leadership: 'we do not intend to hold the British people responsible for their government's crimes in Ireland. Any attacks will be limited to the British political establishment and to military targets.'[62] In the main, PIRA's actions have remained consistent with such statements. Attacks in Northern Ireland are usually designed to intimidate those categories of people listed in the *Green Book* to desist from supporting the institutions of the state. Striking at figures in the political establishment is one of the ways in which the Provisionals believe they can have an impact on governmental decision making. In the aftermath of the Brighton bombing, Adams declared that the operation had been successful in forcing the British to apply 'attention once again to what's happening in the Six Counties',[63] while Morrison argued that if the cabinet had been killed it would have produced a 'rethink in British political circles which would have led to a British withdrawal in a much shorter period.'[64]

Doubtless, attacks against prestige political targets remain a priority for the Provisionals, but because they are mostly well protected it is unlikely that PIRA can focus sufficient military pressure on this area to force a fundamental shift in British policy. For these sorts of reasons the pivotal factor in dislodging establishment interests in Ireland in PIRA's view, resides, not in altering the opinions of those in government, but in changing the perceptions of the British populace as a whole. During an interview in 1984, a PIRA spokesperson stated:

61. Interview with R. O'Bradaigh, *Iris*, April 1981.
62. Interview with PIRA spokespersons, *Magill*, July 1983.
63. 'Adams Says Bombing had Calculated Aim', *The Irish Times*, 15 Oct. 1984.
64. Quoted in 'RUC Withhold Comment on SF Interview', *The Irish Times*, 15 Oct. 1984.

> Such a strategy relies on the premise that the British people do not support British government sponsored murder in Ireland, that they want their troops withdrawn from Ireland as indicated in opinion polls, and that they have the potential to eventually force the British government, because of the cost of the war or the attrition rate or because of demoralisation and war weariness, to withdraw from Ireland. Such a strategy requires the belief that if the British people really knew what was going on in their name they would support the right of the Irish people to self-determination.[65]

At first glance, all the above quotations appear to express a logical account of the function of the armed struggle within the total strategy framework. On closer inspection, they can be revealed as confused, contradictory and, in some cases, self-refuting. In the first instance, if the argument runs that Britain is governed by an exploitative ruling class which maintains entrenched interests in Ireland, then why should the political establishment take any notice of what their own people say? The very notion of a ruling class means that the views of the majority have little or no influence on those who govern. Therefore, what is the point in hoping that public opinion will be able to affect policy towards Northern Ireland? The Provisionals themselves seem implicitly to admit the dubiousness of this proposition in the passage quoted by complaining that the British government is defying popular feeling as expressed through opinion polls. In order to rationalise this analytical problem the Provisionals contradict themselves by conceding that Great Britain *is* internally democratic, so ending up in even more of a rhetorical mess. By asserting that public attitudes *can* affect the definition of the national interest, the Provisionals are acknowledging that the British people *are* responsible for the situation in Ireland as it is they who allow the action of the political establishment to be perpetuated through disinterest if nothing else.

It follows that if the British polity is underpinned by democratic consent, then it is the British people as much as their rulers who are the enemy. In spite of the diasavowals, it is apparent that the Provisionals do

65. PIRA interview, *AP/RN*, 5 Jan. 1984.

harbour certain notions of mass British culpability. This is often reflected when describing the rationale for mainland bombing campaigns: 'It's only when strikes are carried out in Britain that the complacency and indifference of the British people themselves becomes broken.'[66] Although the Provisionals are anxious to avoid civilian casualties, there is little doubt that a basic antipathy towards the British in general lurks beneath the surface of PIRA's rhetoric, where such options as the deliberate targeting of ordinary British citizens may appeal to the instincts of certain republican extremists. In the aforementioned interview, the Provisionals warned:

> What the British people have to realise is that because of their apathy towards Ireland, which is extremely frustrating, and because of British atrocities in Ireland, some oppressed Irish people and republican supporters, out of desperation, would view no-warning bombs as a way of shaking up the British people and their government.[67]

The comfort that the Provisionals draw from opinion polls conducted on the mainland can also be challenged. By their nature, opinion polls provide only a rough guide to public feelings and are prone to fluctuate, especially on complicated issues, and consequently tend to produce mixed findings. Like many political actors, the Provisionals simply select those results which are the most favourable to their point of view. In the mid-1980s one of the polls most agreeable to the republican position, suggested that 45% of those sampled were against Northern Ireland remaining in the UK while 43% believed the government should hold direct talks with the Provisionals. Yet 39%, still a sizeable number, were in favour of the *status quo*.[68] A more extensive survey of British attitudes was revealed in a *Daily Express*-MORI poll in 1987. The findings provided some encouragement for the Provisionals with 61% wanting a withdrawal of troops (22% for immediate withdrawal, 39% for a phased withdrawal, against 34% in favour of keeping the troops in the province for as long as necessary). Furthermore, 55% agreed

66. D. O'Conaill, quoted in O'Malley, p. 287.
67. PIRA interview, *AP/RN*, 5 Jan. 1984.
68. *The Guardian*, 27 Aug. 1984.

that the province was costing too much to maintain. However, attitudes were more divided when it came to political settlements with 58% favouring non-republican solutions, (29% in favour of Northern Ireland remaining part of the UK and 29% supporting independence) while Irish unity was the least favoured solution (27%).[69]

Broadly, results from opinion polls have been ambiguous rather than conclusive. Even if polls reflect decisively against the retention of Northern Ireland as part of the state, it would still take a remarkable level of public cynicism to expel a consenting region of the UK. Such cynicism is simply not evident within British society. For example, in 1980 one poll recorded that 50% of people would vote against Northern Ireland remaining in the UK. Yet two-thirds of those questioned said that it was for the people of Northern Ireland to determine their own future with only 6% believing that anyone elsewhere in the UK should be consulted.[70]

Proceeding from thought to action is the true test of the intensity of public feelings on any issue. PIRA's campaign may have had a negative effect on popular regard for Northern Ireland, but this has been insufficient to override public attitudes towards the maintenance of certain democratic principles like that of regional consent and self-determination. Indeed, when one examines the practicalities of a British withdrawal against the wishes of the majority in the province, or more specifically, against the will of the Protestant community, the prospect looks highly troublesome. Opinion surveys in Northern Ireland consistently register huge Protestant majorities in favour of remaining inside the UK, as high as 91% of the community,[71] with one poll in the late 1970s revealing only 1.5% Protestant support for a united Ireland.[72] The near monolithic nature of Protestant

69. *The Daily Express*, 10 Feb. 1987.
70. *The Guardian*, 22 Dec. 1980.
71. *New Society*, 6 Sept. 1979.
72. Noxon-Browne, *Nation, Class and Creed in Northern Ireland*, p. 24.

opposition when confronted with the united Ireland option, suggests that the forcible incorporation of the province into an all-Ireland framework could well meet with considerable resistance. The question of the military balance is important here. The RUC is the second largest and most heavily armed police force in the UK with over 12,000 officers (including reserves). The UDR is the largest regiment in the British Army numbering some 6300 members. Being 90% and 97% Protestant in composition respectively, they can ultimately be treated as offshoots of the unionist community, and should they choose to resist the imposition of any initiative, would represent a formidable military bloc in themselves. Indeed, along with the UDA, the largest paramilitary group in Northern Ireland, currently with an estimated membership of 13,000 and other assorted loyalist factions, plus the number of Ulstermen serving with regular Irish regiments in the British Army, the territorial reserves and other branches of the armed services, as well as the other licenced firearms in the province (125,904 in 1988),[73] one could plausibly claim, that for its size, the loyalist community is the most militarised in the world. In total, if one adds in all those who have passed through these organisations over a 20-year period since 1969/70, one is talking about a vast body of people with military experience, access to weapons and control over the intelligence system and security apparatus. Should an anti-unionist solution be imposed on the province, it is difficult to envisage the Protestant community consenting to be disarmed as the Provisionals wish, except with the greatest of reluctance. It is not unrealistic to posit that massed and armed Protestant resistance could be numbered in tens and possibly hundreds of thousands, conceivably even out-numbering the entire regular British Army. Voluntary disarmament of the loyalist community is therefore an improbable notion, while physical suppression would be a hazardous undertaking. Suppression would also apply a double

73. *Chief Constable's Annual Report* (Belfast, 1988), p. 26.

standard. If the British and republicans are prepared to countenance the extirpation of Protestant resistance, then Protestants could argue with equal force for the wholesale subjugation of the republicans. Overall, the military balance in Northern Ireland indicates that the imposition of any settlement remains potentially unenforceable if the Protestants choose to resist *en masse*. Further, if the British operate in Ireland on the basis of self-interest, as the Provisionals contend, then following this logic, Britain cannot be expected to fight a costly war against the Protestant community.

Aside from the question of whether it is in Britain's moral or physical power to deliver Protestant acquiescence, there is little to suggest that PIRA's actions, either in Northern Ireland or the mainland, can produce the intended effect of disillusioning both public and government to the extent where the disengagement of Northern Ireland from the UK is seriously contemplated. At best, this intention can be described as an assertion, at worst, a wholly discredited military objective. One of the most significant findings of the 1987 *Daily Express*-MORI poll was that only 3% of respondents placed Northern Ireland as an urgent problem on their list of priorities. Moreover, 45% believed the conflict to be a religious war. Only 6% blamed the British Army for the trouble while a negligible 2% thought that the border was a factor. 'Generally, the survey leaves an impression of apathy and contempt' complained an article in *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 'Ireland can still safely be kept at the very back of the election manifestos'.[74] Such comments, whether intended or not, are an indictment of the failure of PIRA's strategy. After nearly two decades of violence the Provisionals' efforts, by their own admission, have produced no more than an air of impassive insouciance amongst the only group of people who they believe have a significant degree of leverage over the British government. If one chooses to follow the Provisionals' arguments, then one can say that they

74. H. MacThomas, 'British Public Says "No"', *AP/RN*, 12 Feb. 1987.

have unwittingly hindered their own cause by desensitising the British public to the kind of low level military campaign which PIRA wages, thereby contributing to the air of general apathy which they so bitterly resent. In so doing, the Provisionals are helping to perpetuate the very conditions in which the 'ruling establishment's' activities in Ireland can flourish free from any popular inquiry.

Where does all this leave the Provisionals' strategy? There is scant consistency in PIRA's rhetoric on the subject, reflecting little methodical construction as to how the military instrument can be employed within the context of the total strategy to bring about the desired changes. This leaves the Provisionals looking both intellectually and physically vulnerable in the sense that they can neither field solid evidence for the effectiveness of their strategy, nor provide any adequate answer, should they actually succeed in encouraging the British to disengage, about how to survive, let alone overcome, the potential power of Protestant resistance. The lack of clarity in the mechanics of PIRA's strategy conceals a deeper flaw in the Provisional's design. It would be fair to surmise that a confusion in rhetoric is also a symptom of a confusion in analysis. If so, this suggests that despite the revisions in strategic thinking since the late 1970s, the Provisionals still do not possess a clear understanding of the role, efficacy and limitations of the armed struggle.

The Inequality of Power - PIRA's Eternal Dilemma

The imprecision with which the Provisionals regard the function of the military instrument derives in part from the nature of the long war/total strategy. There is no question that the total strategy is a far more advanced theory than the outright military posture of the early 1970s. The aim is to yield absolute military potential for time, in the hope that over the

long-term a reduced but steady level of operations, combined with political activities away from the military conflict, will eventually defeat British resolve to hold Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom. As discussed in Chapter 6, the strategy is a rarified form of psychological attrition. Yet for all the refinement of the total strategy it is a paradoxical construct which, again, fails to square with much of the Provisionals' rhetoric.

Although the military instrument is theoretically graded as a tactic within the total strategy, the Provisionals still recognise the unique pressurising and publicity-getting properties that a campaign of violence possesses compared to other methods of resistance. As a consequence, the Provisionals continue to extol the virtues of the armed struggle: 'The IRA by unrelenting armed struggle, has made [the British] foothold [in Ireland] a very costly one for the British establishment'.[75] It is plain that the Provisionals still regard physical force as the key component in their campaign to obtain a British withdrawal. They pledge that 'attacks will continue and escalate until the final option is taken and Britain leaves Ireland for good.'[76] One might enquire, if the armed struggle plays such a vital role for the Provisionals, why should they then adopt a strategy and organisational system where the main coercive element is scaled down by such an appreciable degree? Given the extent of infiltration by the security forces in the 1970s, it was quite obvious that PIRA could not have carried on with the battalion structure without jeopardising the survival of the movement. Yet a lot of the advantages and disadvantages of dropping the old structure and shifting to the cell system have largely cancelled each other out. By reorganising into such a small force PIRA has been unable to sustain concerted offensives of the kind which did so much to destabilise Northern Ireland in the early 1970s. In addition, the reduction in the number of PIRA

75. *AP/RN*, 3 March 1988.
76. 'Taking Stock', *AP/RN*, 24 April 1986.

activists makes it far easier for the security forces to concentrate their resources against known operatives which leaves the movement just as vulnerable to losses in personnel as it was under the old system. In particular, the successful monitoring and penetration of PIRA has led to a rise in the number of counter-ambushes mounted by the security forces, most notably by the Special Air Service (SAS). Between 1978 and 1988, some 30 PIRA members had been killed in SAS operations.[77] The periods between 1983 and 1984, and between 1987 and 1988, were particularly severe as the Provisionals lost around 15 and 20 members respectively to accidents and shoot-outs. Combined with the arrests of PIRA members, (626 persons were charged with offences in connection with republican paramilitary activities between 1981 and 1987[78]), such losses are bound to have a serious impact on a small organisation. The damage is not felt just in numerical terms but also in the loss of experience and seniority. For example, in May 1987 one of PIRA's most hardened units, the East Tyrone Brigade, was all but wiped out when 8 of its men were killed in an SAS ambush during an attack on an RUC station at Loughall, Co. Armagh.[79] The move to the cell system has thus made even modest losses hard to bear. Earlier in the mid-1980s, when PIRA was suffering heavy casualties with 6 personnel killed between November 1983 and June 1984, the Provisionals acknowledged that: 'By any standard, it is a high rate of attrition by a ruthless and undeniably sophisticated British enemy with far greater manpower and technical resources than the IRA has at its command.'[80]

One purpose of the long war/total strategy is to help deal with the problem of facing a stronger opponent. In particular, it is designed to overcome the danger of provoking a massive security crackdown which PIRA

77. See Appendix A, J. Adams, *et al*, *Ambush*, pp. 191-192.
78. Source: RUC Statistics.
79. 'Tyrone Group One of Most Active', *The Irish Times*, 11 May 1987.
80. 'A War of Sacrifice and Attrition', *Iris*, Aug. 1984.

may not be able to withstand. The intention is to offset the loss of direct military pressure by making greater political capital out of low level engagements in order to demonstrate growing political support in place of growing military momentum. However, the total strategy does not eliminate the escalation dilemma but merely displaces it to another dimension of the conflict. The point is that any reasonably sophisticated counter-insurgent will view a conflict as a many sided confrontation, not simply one which exists on the military/security plane, and fashion repsonses accordingly. In other words, a counter-insurgent will usually have the potential to interdict what one may call an opponent's 'political escalation' just as effectively as military escalation. The political strides made by PSF in the early 1980s came as a shock to the British, but it spurred the government to find more effective means of dealing with the Provisionals, the outcome being the Anglo-Irish Agreement. The Agreement can be seen as a response to stave off danger in the political field just as Operation Motorman was a reaction to the heightened military threat posed by the Provisionals in mid-1972. According to the Provisionals: 'The catalyst for the Hillsborough Treaty was undoubtedly a combination of the Brighton bomb and the electoral rise of Sinn Fein.'[81] This may be true, but it is immaterial. The fact that the Anglo-Irish Agreement is a development which has taken place outside the military arena in response to a perceived political/security threat, does not mean that PSF can expect to benefit politically from the introduction of a measure intended to stunt its growth.

Despite their attempts to claim credit for the introduction of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, the Provisionals have always viewed the Anglo-Irish process as a piece of counter-insurgency aimed at 'putting a diplomatic veneer on British rule and injecting a credibility to constitutional nation-

81. *Iris*, Oct. 1987.

alism so that British rule and its interests can be stabilised in the long-term.'[82] In 1985 the perceived dangers to the Provisionals' position initiated a debate within the movement on how to respond to the introduction of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. Informed journalistic sources in the weeks before the signing of the Agreement, said that the Provisionals believed any London-Dublin agreement would initially be a trap to entice the movement to escalate its military campaign in order to try to kill off the deal, possibly by inciting unionist anger through a return to indiscriminate bombings, so providing the pretext for a security clampdown.[83] Such reports were endorsed following the signing of the Hillsborough Accord when the Provisionals stated their belief that the two governments were trying to create 'a climate in which coercive moves against Sinn Fein would be made possible.'[84] In fact, it seems that the Provisionals had settled on their response over a month before the signing, deciding that an intensification of violence was simply too risky. In October they outlined their intentions:

> ...the IRA is stating that actions will not be carried out that are specifically aimed at dramatically undermining or wrecking the [Anglo-Irish] talks or summit. In this way, the IRA intends to expose the weaknesses of constitutional nationalism and strengthen the case that real gains - independence, peace with justice - can only be achieved through struggle and resistance, through expanding the revolutionary armed struggle of the Irish Republican Army![85]

The Anglo-Irish Agreement had thus scored its first success against the Provisionals by placing them in a double bind. Either they could escalate the conflict, which would damage their electoral support and justify a security clampdown, or they could forego a direct military challenge to the Anglo-Irish Agreement and risk losing the political initiative they had established over the past few years by allowing the benefits of the Agreement to materialise and appeal to the nationalist community. The effects

82. G. Adams, 'Presidential Address', *AP/RN*, 7 Nov. 1985.
83. See E. Moloney, 'Provos Wait for the Anglo-Irish Offensive', *Fortnight*, 21 Oct. 1985.
84. 'Attempt to Isolate Republicans', *AP/RN*, 21 Nov. 1985.
85. 'IRA Not To Be Drawn,' *AP/RN*, 3 Oct. 1985.

of choosing the latter course of action were soon apparent in PSF's poor showing in the January 1986 by-elections. The Agreement had been immediately popular with many nationalists. This bolstered the standing of the SDLP, the party with which the Agreement was most closely associated. Even some PSF voters were initially sympathetic. According to one opinion poll, 22% of PSF voters favoured the Agreement while 10% were strongly supportive.[86] The erosion of PSF's electoral fortunes were confirmed by the 1989 local elections and by the European election of June the same year when PSF attained only 9.1% of the vote.[87] The loss of political impetus in the years following the Agreement's introduction is still a cause of concern to the Provisionals. One source admitted PSF's 'lack of ability to influence political events against a background of the Hillsborough Agreement,' and added, 'as an organisation we have not been able to come to terms with the reality of the effects of Hillsborough within the nationalist community.'[88]

The Provisionals' fear of political marginalisation increased further in the late 1980s following the imposition of a series of media restrictions on the broadcasting of interviews with paramilitary organisations and their supporters. The restrictions were introduced in November 1988 as a response to an upsurge in PIRA activity earlier in the year which culminated in the killing of 8 soldiers in a bomb attack on an Army coach in August. Regulations of a similar kind have existed in the Republic of Ireland since 1976, though these prohibit rather than restrict, the transmission of any paramilitary interviews. PSF has frequently blamed these curbs for its electoral failures in the South. 'Censorship of Sinn Fein is a crucial factor in the Dublin establishment's campaign of disinformation and a central part of its effort to marginalise us,' claimed Adams after the disap-

86. *Fortnight*, Oct. 1986.
87. *Fortnight*, July/Aug. 1989.
88. 'Denis the Menace', 'Needs of the Struggle'.

pointment of the 1987 election.[89] PSF has become increasingly disturbed that sets of controls in both countries are hampering its ability to extend its message beyond its core of support. In 1989 PSF's publicity director, Danny Morrison, disclosed that enquiries to PSF's press centre from the British broadcasting media in the 4 months following the introduction of the restrictions had fallen to 110, compared to 471 in the preceding 4 months.[90]

Behind the worries about PSF's electoral prospects lies the Provisionals' anxiety that what they are seeing in the developments in Anglo-Irish relations, accompanied by measures like the broadcasting controls and so on, is the conjunction of forces lining up against them. Their view is that the Anglo-Irish Agreement is intended to push the unionists into a power sharing deal with the constitutional nationalists while the Irish government underpins this process by 'policing the border' and 'supporting British initiatives.'[91] The Provisionals are fearful that political isolation will set the context for the 'Military and legal suppression of republicans.'[92] It is manifest from what the Provisionals say that they want a relaxed security regime in which to practise their strategy. They do not harbour any wistful notions about a harsher security regime somehow being of benefit to insurgents. One contributor to *Iris Bheag*, warned the movement, 'not to place hope in inadequate theories that resistance rises autonomously out of repression.'[93] Being strong advocates of the utility of the armed force, the Provisionals themselves are, conversely, also afraid of its power should they feel threatened by their enemies with similar means.

The spectre of suppression and political oblivion has prompted a wide debate inside PSF about how to tackle the movement's isolation from the political mainstream. Two internal conferences, one in 1986 and the other

89. Interview with G. Adams, *The Irish People* (USA), 7 March 1987.
90. D. Morrison, *Ireland: The Censored Subject* (Dublin, 1989), pp. 9-10.
91. *Hillsborough - The Balance Sheet 1985-88: A Failure* (Dublin, 1989), p. 13.
92. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
93. 'Paxo', 'A Question About Enniskillen', *Iris Bheag*, No. 5, Dec. 1987, p. 16.

in 1987, concluded that the best way forward would be to develop a broad front by uniting other small pressure groups and parties around themes upon which all could agree, like the desire to expel Britain from Northern Ireland. Such a coalition would campaign on a wide range of economic, social and cultural issues in the South in order to 'polarise the people against the Free State government', and eventually build up the necessary base of support to 'undermine collaboration between the Free State and the Brits.'[94] The most noticeable result of this new emphasis on coalition building has been the banishment of much of the overt socialist idealism from PSF's propaganda. Danny Morrison even took some of his colleagues to task for using obscure socialist terminology which he believed inhibited public understanding of PSF's position. 'Introducing Marxist esperanto', he argued, 'is one sure way of keeping the revolution at bay.'[95] Adams also stressed the 'need to avoid ultra-republican positions'. He outlined the way in which the Provisionals should seek to broaden the appeal of the movement while keeping it firmly on republican lines:

> We have to proceed on the basis of the lowest possible common denominator and at the level of people's understanding... We have to understand those who oppose us. We have to view all this in political terms and develop policies accordingly. The guiding light for such policies must be that they are based on general republican principles and that they bring us somewhere along the road towards our objectives, meeting the needs of the people and the particular conditions which exist.[96]

The most tangible sign of PSF's desire to establish its political credentials amongst a wider audience came in January 1988, when the party began a formal dialogue with the SDLP. PSF's goal in the talks was to engage the SDLP in an attempt to prioritise the issue of Irish unification by pressing the Irish government to launch a 'diplomatic offensive to secure national

94. 'Tonto', 'The Internal Conference - Some Reflections', *Iris Bheag*, No. 1, 1987, pp. 5-6.
95. D. Morrison, 'Bad Language (1)', *Iris Bheag*, No. 3, 1987, pp. 7-8.
96. 'A Bus Ride to Independence and Socialism' speech given to PSF Internal Conference 1986 in G. Adams, *Signposts to Independence and Socialism'* (Dublin, 1988), p. 16.

self-determination.'[97] PSF stated that the aim of its political struggle in Northern Ireland: 'is to popularise opposition to British rule, and to extend that opposition into some form of broad anti-imperialist campaign. Our main political task is to turn opposition to British rule in Ireland into a political demand for national self-determination.'[98] In subsequent correspondence the SDLP made it clear that support for a joint initiative would be conditional on the ending of PIRA's campaign.[99] The logic of the broad front strategy certainly impels the Provisionals in this direction since PSF's endorsement of violence is mainly responsible for its isolation and pariah status on the Irish political scene. It is conceivable that a cessation of the armed struggle would enable the movement to profit electorally, probably by picking up an increased vote from the political left. There are indications that Adams recognises the obstacle that PIRA's campaign poses to PSF's involvement in broad front politics. For example, he agreed that a large measure of the nationalist populations' support for constitutional parties 'rests upon their understandable aversion to the use of physical force and the consequences of physical force.'[100] But in a passage redolent of wanting it both ways, Adams stated:

> Such a movement should not be expected to restrict its support to any particular method of struggle. Therefore, while such a movement would in itself be a non-armed political movement it should not be expected to support armed struggle, nor for that matter, condemn it. Individual members would, as of right, have individual attitudes towards the use of armed struggle.'[101]

This type of statement encourages the impression that from the Provisionals' own point of view, a broad front would merely be an extravagant version of PSF which would itself remain something of an adjunct to PIRA.

97. G. Adams, *Towards a Strategy for Peace*, Letter to J. Hume (PSF Document No. 1, PSF-SDLP Talks), 14 March 1988, p. 20.
98. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
99. J. Hume, Letter to G. Adams (SDLP Document No. 1, PSF-SDLP Talks) 18 March 1988, p. 5.
100. Adams, *A Pathway to Peace*, p. 62.
101. *Ibid.*, p. 77.

The ambiguity displayed towards the use of force within a possible broad front scenario reiterates all the suspicions discussed above about the movement's emotional attachment to violence and the inability, or unwillingness, of PSF to control the military instrument. The doubts surrounding this issue were confirmed during the talks with the SDLP when the Provisionals volunteered a curious description of the purpose of armed force. They began by offering a perfectly valid basis upon which to define the role of the military instrument within their strategy: 'Armed struggle is seen as a political option. Its use is considered in terms of achieving national political aims and the efficacy of other forms of struggle.'[102] After stating this, the Provisionals did not go on to elaborate the specific rationale for the use of force but immediately proceeded to give a moral justification:

> This need to wage an armed struggle arises from within the political experience of the Northern nationalist community. This experience has clearly taught them that the inherent undemocratic nature of the Union is maintained through the superior use of force by the British state; that the British state still acts against the democratic wish of the Irish people by its commitment to maintain the Union; and that Britain has no intention of withdrawing its political, military and economic interests from the Six Counties.'[103]

Not only does the passage not follow logically from the statement which precedes it, but the imperative contained in the extract, the reference to the 'need to wage an armed struggle', is never explained. Furthermore, the reasoning in the excerpt is itself questionable and reinforces the view that the Provisionals have little comprehension of the functional value of armed struggle as the passage inadvertently undermines any subsequent explanation they may seek to provide regarding the role of armed force in their campaign. The Provisionals argue that the British maintain the union through the 'superior use of force'. Yet, if the British are prepared to commit that superior level of force in the first place, then what possible use can PIRA's

102.Adams, *Towards a Strategy for Peace*, p. 7.
103.*Ibid.*, p. 8.

inferior force be in challenging the might of British dominion?

The lack of coherence in the Provisionals' strategic pronouncements led the SDLP to ask, 'is the method more sacred than the cause?'[104] It is a question which neatly encapsulates the tensions between those arguments that the movement may see for keeping the armed struggle and those for dispensing with it for the sake of political progression. If the Provisionals ever choose to renounce violence in order to participate in mainstream politics, either as an independent entity or within a broad coalition, the movement risks losing its sense of identity and becoming submerged among the welter of other minor parties, thus allowing other groups like RSF to push themselves forward as the new ultra-nationalist standard bearers. On the other side, persistence with the campaign of violence merely underwrites the Provisionals' isolation by ensuring their exclusion from any part in the framing of a political settlement.

Since late 1989 there have been a number of press reports which have suggested that the Provisionals are engaged in a debate between hardliners and more pragmatic elements who believe that a military impasse has been reached and that the movement should call a ceasefire, possibly to allow PSF to participate in constitutional talks on the future government of Northern Ireland.[105] At the time of writing nothing of this sort has materialised and the Provisionals have consistently denied any such talk of a ceasefire. Martin McGuinness has condemned the reports as a product of 'lazy journalism', which he describes as 'less than useless' because 'it engenders futile, wishful thinking'.[106] In television interviews during 1990, Adams has declared that aside from routine differences of opinion, there is no serious

104.SDLP statement on end of PSF-SDLP Talks, *The Irish Times*, 6 Sept. 1988.
105.See for example, C. Ryder, 'IRA Supporters Debate Calling End to Violence', *The Daily Telegraph*, 23 March 1990.
106.M. McGuinness, 'A Majority... On the Island... Are in Favour of Unification', *Fortnight*, April 1990.

internal debate over the validity of the armed struggle.[107] Certainly, the absence of any firm evidence from the republican side means it is right to treat rumours of a ceasefire with caution, especially since to call off the armed struggle to engage in the constitutional politics of the North would require a huge ideological somersault and would raise the spectre of yet another split. However, if only partially true, the rumours underline the difficulties confronting the movement in trying to unify the demands for more effective political participation with the hardline military exclusivism of the republican tradition. If anything, the Provisionals' present predicament highlights the fact that the move to abandon abstention was conceived in haste without a great deal of consideration for the disruptive effects this was likely to have upon the internal cohesion of republican doctrine. The rush to bankroll its electoral gains, partly out of a desire to capitalise on PSF's successes earlier in the 1980s, and partly out of fear at the possible impact of the Anglo-Irish Agreement on its level of support, seemed a sensible move at the time. The adoption of a strategy which emphasises political activity alongside a military campaign can be highly effective if the insurgent enjoys an expanding popular base. When the Provisionals decided to end abstention they were still riding on a wave of optimism regarding their electoral prospects. Since 1986, however, the Provisionals have experienced a reversal in their political fortunes which in many ways has produced the worst possible outcome for the movement, as a contracting political base merely generates negative publicity by demonstrating to the outside world that PIRA fights its war on a minority definition of nationalism. Yet the Provisionals still rigidly maintain the correctness of their position. The immobilism in their evaluation of the conflict in Northern Ireland was evident during the talks with the SDLP which concluded in

107.Interview with G. Adams, 'Terms for Peace', Dispatches, Channel 4, 12 April 1990. Also, interview with G. Adams, Newsnight, BBC 2, 20 June 1990.

September 1988. Challenged to accept in principle that it was the deeply felt objections of Northern Protestants, and not malign British interference, which prevented Irish unification, Adams merely reasserted the fount of all republican belief: 'From the outset of the dialogue Sinn Fein has put the consistent republican and democratic view that the root cause of the conflict in Ireland is to be found in the British government's denial to the Irish nation of its right to national self-determination.'[108]

Whatever the weaknesses of the Provisionals' analysis, their compact interpretation of the conflict makes it easier to draw out some of the main conclusions regarding PIRA's present strategic position. The polarised view of a straight fight between British imperialism and the forces of Irish freedom returns us to PIRA's central strategic problem. In essence, no matter how the Provisionals try to configure their strategy in relation to their attempts to balance the military and political components of their campaign, they simply do not possess the capacity to neutralise superior British power. Whatever the merits of the total strategy, it aspires to reconcile two conflicting requirements. On the one hand, it endeavours to preserve a degree of coercive military pressure. On the other, it tries to reduce reliance on military means in order to lower the risk that PIRA's violence will induce the British to take even sterner counter-measures against the movement. Although the total strategy does, on the whole, get the movement off the escalation hook, it should also be said that it gets the British government off as well since the introduction of counter-insurgency measures are always likely to be politically contentious. In effect, whether the Provisionals realise it or not, they are playing to the British tune. The efforts to ensure that PIRA's violence is not too provocative is itself a form of deference to British power. Indeed, one might say that it assists the British goal of reducing the conflict to a so-called acceptable

108.PSF statement on end of PSF-SDLP Talks, *The Irish Times*, 6 Sept. 1988.

level of violence. Now that the movement has partially gone down the political road, the British are, presumably, content to leave PSF to wrestle with its self-imposed dilemmas over how to establish its credibility within the mainstream of Irish political life. The confused and contradictory rhetoric which has been engendered in trying to resolve the tensions within Irish republican strategic thinking still makes it difficult to determine the exact function of military instrument. It remains an enigma for outside observers, and, quite possibly, for the Provisionals themselves.

A war of psychological attrition can be accurately described as a clash of wills aimed at wearing down an opponent's resolve. However, when waged by a small and comparatively weak belligerent, a war of psychological attrition can only be expected to function as a limited pressurising instrument, as the efficacy of such a strategy, and the survival of the organisation which practises it, will ultimately rest on the self-restraint of a more powerful adversary. This brings us back to PIRA's irreducible dilemma. Regardless of the intensity with which the Provisionals choose to fight its war, Britain will always have the power to recontain the conflict at a level it finds tolerable, be it through military operations like Motorman, legal measures like the Prevention of Terrorism Act, or political measures like the Anglo-Irish Agreement. If it is tolerable for the British, then the Provisional IRA has virtually no chance of attaining all its objectives with its chosen means. The military instrument may be able to obtain compromise at the margins, but not at the centre of the disputed object.

CONCLUSION

This research has attempted to understand and dissect the Irish republican strategic perspective in order to determine how the movement has seen its aims being advanced through the employment of armed force. Reference to strategic theory has been used to help analyse the judgements exercised by the movement on this issue. It is difficult to reach any definitive conclusion, not least because republican violence is itself the product of immensely complex historical antecedents which go beyond the parameters of strategic theory. In addition, as long as the conflict which the movement wages is still in progress, the potential will always exist for a change in conditions to affect the application of military means. Indeed, with an ongoing conflict of this sort, it is tempting to try to analyse the significance of the very latest turn of events. However, this would not only be highly conjectural, but really a futile exercise in running to stand still which would, as a consequence, be unlikely to enhance our understanding of the general historical forces which guide the movement's military thinking. Therefore, this concluding section will try to reflect rather than speculate. So, accepting that any chronological cut-off point is inevitably going to be somewhat arbitrary, let us pause for thought on the development of republican strategy up to around 1989/90. First, by drawing out some of the main themes of the thesis we can start to form an overall assessment of the role of the military instrument within Irish republican strategy.

This research began by outlining a number of ideas that have informed republican thinking about the use of force in the political process. Many of these ideas have been drawn from the inspiration of Wolfe Tone, the Young Irelanders and the Fenians, though the genesis of the Irish republican tradition undoubtedly extends much further back in time. These ideas include the depiction of Britain as the colonial interloper, the source of all

Ireland's hardship; the dedication to a purified vision of a nation cleansed from British influence; and a commitment to the forcible expulsion of the British from Ireland. The inculcation of these beliefs through a continuous process of generational revolt coalesced into a staunch, exclusive military tradition which has formed the ideological core of the Irish republican strategic thought over many decades.

The 1916 rising was the ultimate expression of republican symbolism; an exemplary act of sacrificial violence against British authority. For republicans, the nationalist vanguard was seen to crystallise disaffection with British rule and set in train the events that were to lead to revolt. In the Anglo-Irish war the IRA fought a model anti-colonial campaign where small-scale guerrilla actions were skilfully exploited to pressurise Britain into a settlement. However, full independence and jurisdiction over the whole of Ireland could not be achieved by military means alone. Despite forcing Britain into negotiations, the combined strength of British and unionist opposition ensured that the island was partitioned and the Irish Free State granted limited sovereignty. It was at this point that the tensions in the republican strategic outlook became apparent. The absolute adherence to the precepts of republican doctrine meant that the movement was unable to accept the reality of the Treaty settlement. Ideological rigidity was the main reason why the more pragmatic elements never prospered inside the movement and at various stages over the next few decades would feel compelled to withdraw.

The immediate impact of the refusal to come to terms with the Treaty plunged Ireland back into war. The civil war demonstrated the full weight of the Irish republican tradition in action; the lack of control over the military instrument, the inability to recognise the extent of the power of its opponents and the total belief in the efficacy of violence in pursuit of

the true republic. The civil war marked the complete domination of ideological symbolism over practical considerations of the use of force. Even after the trauma of defeat, the notion of the unfinished revolution and the feeling of ideological betrayal continued to prevail within republican strategic thought. Consequently, the pressure to engage in military action remained pervasive. The 1939 bombing campaign and the 1956-62 border war epitomised the image of a self-possessed military organisation devoid of coherence and direction. The reinterpretation of the armed struggle within a social revolutionary context, though a radical departure from standard republican practice, represented the rise of the socialist-republican tradition to a position of predominance in the movement's leadership. Even so, with the mounting sectarian conflagrations over the civil rights issue in Northern Ireland in the late 1960s, the more traditional and Northern based elements of the IRA increasingly came to view the preoccupation with the techniques of social revolution as an irrelevant indulgence.

The Provisional IRA's campaign from 1970 to 1977 mirrored almost exacttly the republican experience between 1919 to 1962. The effectiveness of PIRA's strategy again tempted the British into talking with the republican leadership in the summer of 1972. However, the uncompromising nature of republican doctrine prevented the Provisionals from seeing war as a bargaining instrument. This made the movement incapable of converting its military successes into political gains. Frustrated in its attempts to reach its objectives with its limited means, and having already stimulated the activities of the Protestant paramilitaries, PIRA tried to reaffirm its military strength which merely provoked a security crackdown from its more powerful British adversary. After Operation Motorman, the Provisionals lost much of their momentum and have never regained such a position of potential influence. With the protraction of the conflict, the ideological symbols of

republicanism again started to assert themselves as the main regulators of the movement's military activity. This was especially noticeable during the 1975 ceasefire when the lack of control over PIRA units helped fuel outright sectarian attacks on Protestant targets. The politically autonomous nature of the Provisional IRA, and the random violence with which it was increasingly associated, placed the movement at the edge of disaster. Gripped by intellectual stasis, and with only the prospect of yet more violence to offer beleaguered Northern Catholics, the Provisionals' strategy lost most of its credibility.

From 1977 onwards, with the rise of the Northern radicals, a real attempt was made to tackle some of the main defects within the process of strategic formulation. The reorganisation and politicisation of the movement, and the forming of the long war approach, saved PIRA from defeat and placed the military instrument on a theoretically more adequate plane, though in practice, there remain doubts over whether the difficulties and contradictions that have afflicted republican strategic thought have really been resolved.

Having outlined the progression of the main themes of the research, one can make a number of observations about the process of strategic change within the republican movement. Although the republican movement's strategic development during the twentieth century, particularly after 1921, was undoubtedly hindered by ideological inflexibility, its pattern of military activity has, in fact, been very diverse. Over the decades the movement has embraced an assortment of low intensity war techniques, ranging from anti-colonial guerrilla warfare in the early twentieth century, terrorist bombings of Britain in the late 1930s, rural insurgent war in the 1956-62 border campaign, through to a social revolutionary strategy of the 1960s and the

largely urban guerrilla campaign in the early 1970s, ending up in the present with a dual military/electoral strategy.

The constant factor in republican strategic history has been the pervasive influence of the aforementioned doctrinal precepts. These affect how republicans interpret different methods of resistance and guide the assumptions they make about their chosen strategies. It is this process which has sometimes pulled the military instrument out of the realms of established strategic theory. For example, by defining the present conflict in Northern Ireland in colonial terms as a struggle solely over the British presence, the Provisionals feel able to ignore Protestant opposition as a factor in their strategic calculations, regardless of the fact that it probably constitutes the main obstacle to their goal of a united Ireland. Consequently, PIRA's campaign against local members of the 'crown forces' merely reinforces Protestant hostility. Also, the commitment to the absolutist convictions of republicanism have obstructed the IRA from recognising when its strategies *have been* successful in fulfilling their potential, as in 1921 and 1972 when the British were pressured by republican violence to open a dialogue. The inability to think in terms of compromise has made it difficult for the movement to detect the limited utility of its violence and has prevented the IRA from moving ahead in stages. Instead, the IRA has squandered positions of temporary military advantage by persisting with a particular strategy even though it has exhausted its potential. When this happens, a process appears to be set in train whereby ideological symbolism comes to dominate over the careful evaluation of the function of armed struggle. In these circumstances, the military instrument can become uncontrollable as the ideological attachment to physical force starts fulfilling its own inner dynamic, even if such actions, as evinced in the sectarian war in the mid-1970s, are regressive in relation to the movement's

stated goals. Faced with the defeat of its strategy, the IRA proceeds to search for another way in which to recast the military instrument. Therefore, the history of the IRA has been marked, not by a stolid persistence with a single unsuccessful strategy, so much as a tradition of poor strategic analysis which causes the movement to over-estimate the ability of its means to overcome far more powerful adversaries.

Although this appraisal represents a broadly accurate description of the process of strategic change, it does need to be qualified because ideological principles can be challenged if they are deemed to impede the progress of the republican movement, though invariably at the expense of a split. It is easy to see why internal disruption has taken place over the issue of abstention as it is the key factor which inter-relates with all the other doctrinal precepts. It insulates the movement from corrupting external influences, preserves the idea of the nationalist vanguard and sustains the perceived virtues of the armed struggle, though as the 1986 RSF split revealed, it is not always the doctrinaire hardliners who have remained in the ascendant. The general tenor of republican history shows that following the 1927 split with de Valera, when the movement was pruned down to a dedicated few, where divisions have occurred, it has been those factions which have had both the means and the willingness to sustain the commitment to armed struggle that have remained the most prominent.

Overall, the process of strategic change within the republican movement has been both capricious and volatile. Although the republican tradition is certainly inward looking, it is not incapable of self-criticism and this has permitted the movement to change or modify its strategy, though usually within very limited bounds. Whether such changes have necessarily enhanced the movement's ability to achieve its goals is, of course, open to question, but they have enabled the IRA to adapt and survive. Yet for all the

military instrument's many incarnations, and in spite of the republicans' deterministic rhetoric and self-belief that they are predestined to win, the over-riding need to endure in the face of adversity has resulted in the IRA's strategic tradition being characterised more by insecurity than certainty and continuity.

The substantive revisions wrought by the Northern radicals in the late 1970s was certainly a product of the desperate insecurity induced by the disastrous 1975 ceasefire, but it did appear to herald a serious attempt to rectify some of the structural deficiencies in republican strategic analysis. Theoretically, the re-evaluation has shifted the traditional perspectives of the movement by placing the military instrument in a wider context where the value of all available means are considered without favour, while the abandonment of abstention suggests a determination to end any sense of elitism, with the movement now prepared to submit itself to the electorate for popular endorsement. Fundamentally, the re-evaluation has sought to reject any idea that the maxims of the past should regulate republican activity in the present. Martin McGuinness said in 1985 that part of the process of reinvigoration lay in the willingness of many republicans to 'discard many of the myths that nourished our movement, myths that had, objectively, become fetters.' McGuinness continued:

> As a national movement we are still learning but at least republicans can now admit that there are unthinking republicans, and that we cannot expect unconditional and uncritical support because of Easter 1916 or just because a majority of Irish people voted for Sinn Fein in 1918. Any support that Sinn Fein gains must be earned through a coherent revolutionary political programme. By accepting that fact we remove the danger implicit in all liberation struggles, that a blind desire for freedom can become an irrational dash into reaction and despair.[1]

The modern republican leadership now seems keenly aware of the trends and nuances of the movement's history. The leadership appears particularly sensitive to the stultifying effects that a self-conscious invocation of an

1. M. McGuinness, 'Discarding the Fetters of Republican Myth', *Fortnight*, 3 March, 1985.

ideological tradition can have in preventing the movement from adapting to changing conditions which has, in the past, trapped the movement in a debilitating cycle where initial military success is followed by marginalisation and defeat. It was a theme that Adams was anxious to stress at the 1986 Ard-Fheis: 'Our experience teaches us that as a group we are often successful when we have a flexible approach. We are at our weakest when we are forced into a static political position where the more powerful forces of imperialism can be employed to isolate us.'[2]

In spite of the evident desire to adopt a more flexible approach to the process of strategic formulation through the constant re-examination of the relevance of policies, the utility of the means and the validity of beliefs, there is little to suggest that the movement's central assumption has been challenged from within. The perception of the Northern Irish conflict as a problem of British colonial interference remains firmly in place as the cornerstone of republican analysis. 'The fundamental aim', Adams proclaimed in a speech in April 1988, 'has always been to get Britain to abandon its partition policy and adopt instead a policy of reunifying Ireland - that is withdrawing from Ireland and handing over sovereignty to an all-Ireland government.'[3] This constitutes the basic mental frame around which PIRA seeks to construct a viable strategy, but it also sustains other traditional facets of republican belief. It still drives the perception of the armed struggle as the most effective means of forcing Britain out, and belligerent statements continue to issue forth on the subject: 'The British will only be talked out of Ireland through the rattle of machine guns and the roar of explosives.'[4]

The Provisionals' colonial exegesis also governs the movement's dis-

2. Adams, 'Presidential Address', in PSF, *The Politics of Revolution*, p. 9.
3. 'Freedom - Much More than the Right to Vote', speech delivered in April 1988, in Adams, *Signposts to Independence and Socialism*, p. 5.
4. Easter Statement, *AP/RN*, 23 May 1987.

position towards Ulster-Protestants who are still perceived as 'hopelessly reliant on Britain' and regarded by the British purely 'in terms of their place in the political and strategic interests of British imperialism.'[5] As a national minority who make up only 20% of Irish people they are not entitled to a 'veto over national independence'.[6] The movement's offhand dismissal of loyalism has been summed up by Danny Morrison: 'There is nothing we can do to convince them and I think it pointless to waste energy trying.'[7]

The disregard for the Protestant viewpoint tends to uphold the charge of crypto-sectarianism. To argue, as Adams has, that 'if there are five UDR men lined up by the IRA there is no question of asking which of these five are Protestant and which are Catholics,'[8] is either disingenuous or simply naive when over 90% of the locally recruited security forces are drawn from the Protestant community. The objective truth about PIRA's campaign, whatever that might be, is irrelevant. It is a question of interpretation. The cold logic of PIRA's colonial analysis may well mean that it makes no religious distinctions in its targeting policy. The point is that the Protestants interpret the killing of members of the RUC and UDR as deliberate acts of sectarian genocide. Moreover, PIRA's record both in the sectarian war in the mid-1970s and in more recent times with operations like the Enniskillen bombing and the assassination of unionist politicians, renders the Provisionals secular incantations somewhat unconvincing.

Furthermore, the rejection of loyalism as a phenomenon of any durable significance sits uneasily with the nature of Protestant/unionist power as revealed over the past 20 years in Northern Ireland, with, for instance, the rise of the Protestant paramilitaries which did so much to undermine PIRA's strategy in the early 1970s and the Ulster Workers Council Strike in 1974.

5. *AP/RN*, 14 July, 1988.
6. Adams, *A Pathway to Peace*, p. 41.
7. Morrison, in Collins, *Ireland After Britain*, p. 92.
8. Adams, *The Politics of Irish Freedom*, p. 120.

It also ignores the fact that it is Protestants who continue to dominate much of the security apparatus. The commentator, David McKittrick, has written that 'Sinn Fein represents the last expression of the failure of Irish nationalism to come to terms with Unionism.'[9] A product of this failure is that PIRA conducts its military operations in a manner which fuels the Protestant siege mentality and in many ways reinforces Protestant political cohesion by keeping the unionist community alarmed and armed. The extent to which PIRA's campaign has militarised the loyalists and retrenched their hostility towards Irish nationalism must put a serious questionmark over whether PIRA could survive in any vacuum created by a British withdrawal.

In a speech delivered in 1986, Martin McGuinness sought to elaborate on the new, progressive bearing of the republican leadership by describing how the movement's historical tradition should be squared with the need to maintain a forward looking, energetic and politically mature oraganisation capable of responding to popular concerns, acknowledging its own problems and accepting criticism:

> In 14 years' time we will be in the 21st century and the struggle of our past, no matter how heroic, no matter how tragic, will have limited relevance. Of course, we must remember Irish history. As republicans we possess a continuity of vision and of action that stretches back to 1798 and beyond. But the Ireland Wolfe Tone lived in bears only a historical relationship to the Ireland of today and of tomorrow. Every time we refuse to consider new options, to engage in revolutionary self-criticism, to examine the politics and the aspirations of the Irish people, we betray reality. And republicans of all people, should never be afraid to face the real world... However, one of our political failings, and one that still must be combated, is our apparent readiness to dismiss evaluations of the movement that conflict with our own views.'[10]

The passage encapsulates the essence of an evolving movement, drawing inspiraton from the past but continually seeking to refine its analysis and methods. However, the limits to the revisionist process were clearly

9. D. McKittrick, 'Decades of Violence in a World of Stalemate', *The Independent*, 14 Aug. 1989.
10. M. McGuinness, *Bodenstown 1986*, Text of oration to annual Wolfe Tone commemoration (Wolfe Tone Society) (London, 1986).

marked out earlier in the speech when McGuinness attacked the 'rewriting of history by West Britons and British propaganda'.[11] The presumption seems to be that only republicans are entitled to review history when it suits them, while everyone else should conform to a rarified traditional view, and that intellectual development within the movement is permissible only so long as it sustains the basic assumptions of republican analysis. In fact, the speech underlines the dichotomy in republican political thinking. At one level, the Provisionals attempt to project the image of a consummate rational actor operating in the 'real world', untutored by the myths of the past and dispassionately assessing alternative courses of action, yet at the same time, trying to evade essential questions of the 'real world' which impinge on the issue of strategic formulation, such as the nature of the British presence, the limited effectiveness of republican means and the scope of Protestant hostility.

The lengths to which the Provisionals go to avoid addressing sensitive areas in order to maintain the parameters which underpin their analysis makes their pronouncements about the validity of the military instrument both shallow and inconsistent. Part of the problem in trying to detect any firm comprehension of the role of the military instrument is that ever since the early 1970s the Provisionals have cited so many theories and theorists in support of their campaign that it is difficult to know exactly what they believe. The Provisionals' propaganda is often full of references to, amongst others, the theories of Mao, Marighela, Taber, Guevarra, Clausewitz and Liddell Hart.[12] *Iris Bheag*, the PSF journal which is largely for internal consumption, is regularly interspersed with excerpts from the writings

11. *Ibid.*.
12. Examples of allusions to such theorists in the early mid-1970s can be found in the following, *AP*, 1 Feb. 1974 (Liddell Hart), *RN*, 29 May 1974, (reference to Clausewitzian theories), *RN*, 13 July 1974, (Taber & Mao), *The Volunteer* (Derry), Aug. 1974 (Taber), *Eire Og*, 18 Oct. 1975, (reference to Marighela's theories), and *RN*, 8 Jan. 1977, (Taber).

of military practitioners, third world leaders and revolutionary theorists.[13] The pamphlet, *Notes for Revolutionaries*, contains an extensive list of inspiring strategic proverbs from almost every major military thinker since Sun Tzu in the fifth century BC.[14] The inclusion of such dictums, may only be designed to enthuse the movement with revolutionary ardour and, of course, usually there is no more than a loose relationship between theories of war and the practical reality. But, ultimately, their rhetorical usage in the Provisionals' literature seems both a cause and effect of PIRA's own confusion. The Provisionals tend to quote these aphorisms out of thin air without giving due regard to the fact that low intensity warfare strategies and philosophies of war are highly divergent, often at complete odds with each other. Clausewitzian theory is not the same as that of Liddell Hart. Mao all but contradicts Marighela. And so on. There is no attempt to assemble these disparate pieces of information into any systematic theory or plan.

One might suspect that the closer one examines the evidence surrounding PIRA's military rhetoric the more it would converge into a sense of uniformity. It does not. It splays out into an intriguing form of strategic chaos where every piece of rationalising information is extracted to give the impression of the skilful appreciation and exploitation of the military instrument. The end product is one where it is extremely hard to pin down the Provisionals to any coherent statement of strategic intent. In 1989, Danny Morrison stated, 'when it is politically costly for the British to remain in Ireland, they'll go... it won't be triggered until a large number of British soldiers are killed and that's what's going to happen.'[15] This appears to be the only discernible core of republican military doctrine; hit the British hard enough and they will eventually give up. It is simple,

13. See for example, *Iris Bheag*, Nos. 2,3,4,5, (1987) and 6,8,12 (1988).
14. PSF, *Notes for Revolutionaries*, pp. 27-40.
15. '*Playboy* Interview: The IRA', reprinted in *Magill*, March 1989.

crude, theoretically it may even be true, but totally beyond PIRA's demonstrable capacity to achieve in practice.

The lack of any credible definition of the role of the armed struggle casts doubt as to how far the Provisional IRA has changed its basic outlook since the movement's reorganisation in the late 1970s. In May 1987, McGuinness declared that 'the IRA is now a real people's army' which 'has broken with militarism and 'with elitism'.'[16] This stood in contravention to a statement issued 7 months later which proclaimed the movement's intention to 'militarise the armed struggle in the North'.'[17] Furthermore, it is debatable whether the politicisation of the movement has banished elitism and turned PIRA into an army of the people, or even if it was ever intended to. Just after he was elected MP for West Belfast, Gerry Adams argued: 'The IRA does not need an electoral mandate for armed struggle. It derives its mandate from the presence of the British in the six counties.'[18] But how can the Provisionals profess to be a 'people's army' without regard to some form of quantifiable mandate? There is a strong sense here in which the Provisionals appear to be seeking to use elections as a propaganda ploy to claim political backing for their campaign while, in fact, retrenching their own emotional commitment to the use of violence. This suspicion is reinforced by comments carried in the republican press such as that of an editorial in April 1985: 'Sinn Fein, by popularising political and cultural resistance and by defending the right of the IRA to wage war, has consolidated and made permanent the sympathetic base from which the armed struggle is launched.'[19] So, according to such statements, the use of force is not a direct function of popular approval, but a pre-existing historic right of resistance which happens to be acknowledged by a certain level of electoral support. If this

16. M. McGuinness, 'The Right to Freedom', Bobby Sands Memorial Lecture, 10 May 1987, reprinted in *AP/RN*, 28 May 1987.
17. Christmas and New Year Statement, *AP/RN*, 31 Dec. 1987.
18. Interview with G. Adams, *Magill*, July 1983.
19. *AP/RN*, 25 April 1985.

assessment is accurate, then the principles which supposedly underwrite the entire politicisation process are little more than a pretence to suggest that the armed struggle is a carefully selected and reasoned instrument of policy, when, in truth, it is an independent variable unconstrained by reference either to external sources of legitimacy or serious analysis of its utility.

Due to the historical longevity of the republican movement, it is impossible to believe, and unreasonable to expect, the present leadership to have unburdened itself completely from the impedimenta of the republican legacy. Inevitably, such ideological symbolism will continue to be reflected in the process of decision making, no matter how radical and progressive the Provisionals believe themselves to be. Yet the degree to which republican ideological symbolism still appears to be the main regulator of PIRA's activity opens up the whole question as to whether, beneath the surfeit of confused rationalisations, the military instrument has any strategic value at all? After the killing of Lord Mountbatten along with a number of his companions and the loss of 18 soldiers at Warrenpoint in August 1979, the Provisionals issued a ferocious statement promising the 'British ruling class' that 'as long as they do not give a damn then they shall hear from us the oppressed Irish people'. The statement went on to spell out PIRA's intention towards the 'old bulldog': '...WE WILL RIP OUT ITS SENTIMENTAL IMPERIALIST HEART.'[20] Rather than accentuating the killings as actions designed to elicit certain responses that would advance PIRA's goals, the language contained in the statement, instead, betrayed strong emotional undercurrents which indicated a desire to strike at Britain regardless of any effects, positive or negative, such actions engendered. Whatever the exact purpose of the Mountbatten and Warrenpoint killings, the description of such operations in the terms expressed in the statement, and the apparent motivations they reveal, do not reside within any recognisable strategic framework.

20. *AP/RN*, 1 Sept. 1979.

Could, then, the military instrument merely be a vehicle for the transmission of republican anger and revenge? Could it be both the ends and means of PIRA's campaign, where the emphasis is on sustaining the self-image of a strong and feared enemy of British influence in Ireland? Such a hypothesis is given substance by the way in which the Provisionals appear to feed off the reaction caused by their campaign of violence. After each major PIRA attack the republican press invariably examines the impact it has had in the British media, taking particular gratification from any backhanded compliments paid to the effectiveness of PIRA's campaign through pronouncements that its 'bombers are the deadliest in the world,'[21] or that: 'Nowhere in Ireland, Britain or Europe can any of the British forces truly relax'.[22] Perhaps the most revealing comment was made by the Provisionals themselves following two explosions in central London on 20 July 1982 in which 9 soldiers were killed:

> 'Why did the IRA do it? What did they hope to achieve?' was the basic formula screamed out in various shapes and forms by most British newspapers in their Wednesday morning editions. The fact that literally all of these mass circulation newspapers devoted their front pages, several other pages, and their leader column or editorial to Tuesday's double-bomb attack should have served as sufficient answer to them.[23]

If PIRA's underlying *raison d'etre* is simply to fortify its self-image, then this will have a disruptive effect on strategic decision making as the military instrument will not necessarily be calculated purely in functional terms as the desire merely for self-preservation may become the over-riding goal of the movement. It is a theory which may go some way to explain the apparent paradox whereby PIRA's actions appear to be one of the main factors reinforcing the *status quo*. If the survival of the movement is paramount,

21. Quoted from *The Daily Mirror*, following killing of Lord Justice Maurice Gibson on 25 April 1987 in 'Deadliest in the World', *AP/RN*, 30 April 1987.
22. Quoted from *The Sunday Telegraph*, following killing of 8 soldiers at Ballygawley, Co. Tyrone, in M. MacDiarmada, 'Britain's Dilemma', *AP/RN*, 25 Aug. 1988.
23. 'What the Papers Say', *AP/RN*, 22 July 1982.

then the Provisionals will have no real interest in seeing the conflict brought to any resolution. Instead, their actions will be geared towards sustaining the conditions in which the movement can thrive irrespective of how the ability to achieve its declared objectives is affected. Consequently, PIRA's violence inflames Protestant opinion and encourages instability, thereby sustaining the requirement for a British Army presence and high levels of security in general. This situation, in turn, nourishes the Provisionals by feeding Catholic fear, resentment and alienation.

To suggest that the military instrument is being used to sustain collective identity rather than fulfil external goals is a serious charge for a strategic theorist to level at any political organisation. However, it is only in the period between the early 1920s and early 1960s, notwithstanding the odd excursions into socialist theory during the 1930s, that one could claim with any certitude that the IRA was a self-perpetuating military tradition dedicated to keeping alive the purity of the republican vision. At other times, the IRA could at least justify its violence with reference to a context in which, as in Northern Ireland today, it could legitimately claim a level of communal support.

The problem with the theory of bureaucratic self-perpetuation is that it ascribes subconscious drives to the actions of a particular group. In effect, it is a psychological conspiracy theory. For this reason, the theory is unprovable. So it is with the Provisionals, because there is no question that for most of the time they do provide a rhetorical rationale for the armed struggle. For example, the long war approach, adopted in the late 1970s, is a perfect self-justifying framework, as it allows the perpetuation of the movement to proceed in tandem with a strategic rationale, excusing present failure with the promise of future success. The motto

Tiocfaidh ar la - our day will come - is perhaps more than a meaningless republican slogan.

Even if PIRA's pronouncements on the armed struggle do not stand up to academic interrogation, it does not automatically follow that the movement is being governed by the internal dynamics of group survival. There may be a myriad of other political, psychological and sociological explanations as to why PIRA acts in the way it does. The group dynamics explanation therefore opens up the entire issue of causality in relation to republican violence which is both a massive area in its own right and falls outside the ambit of the strategic theory. Also, the hypothesis offers only a mono-causal explanation of political violence and rests on a number of problematic assumptions concerning the attraction of socially deficient personalities towards groups like the IRA. Such assumptions, if not fairly dubious themselves, require a great deal of psychological research, which this author is not qualified to undertake, before the theory could be propounded with any confidence.[24] In any case, in the light of both the republican movement's history, which has shown that aspects of its doctrine can be successfully overturned and rumours of debates inside the republican movement over the value of the armed struggle, any outright assertion of the group dynamics theory would be premature. Nevertheless, there is an aspect of the theory which does have some bearing on this analysis. One perceptible thread in the history of the republican movement after 1921 is that the desire to preserve a distinct ideo-military entity often appears to have been placed at a higher premium than the willingness to consider whether military action has necessarily been the best way to advance republican goals. We can say that this may be one factor which has caused the republican movement, at

24. For a discussion of this theory see J. Post, 'Group and Organisational Dynamics of Political Terrorism: Implications for Counter-Terrorist Policy' in P. Wilkinson and A. Stewart (eds.), *Contemporary Research on Terrorism* (Aberdeen, 1987).

points in its history, to misapply the military instrument. This is only as far as the evidence allows the strategist to go. A wider investigation into the theory of bureaucratic self-perpetuation as a causal factor may be the next stage in the argument, for there are occasions when PIRA's mask of rationality does appear to slip which, implicitly at least, reveals the incentive to maintain the armed struggle to be less than directly functional in any strategic sense. For example, in 1978 a senior member of PIRA's leadership was asked during an interview whether the fighting of the past decade had been worth the cost? 'Of course not', he replied, 'Virtually nothing has been achieved.' He went on: 'We can't give up now and admit that men and women were sent to their graves died for nothing.'[25] These sentiments were echoed nine years later in an editorial in *An Phoblacht/ Republican News* commemorating the 1916 Easter rising: 'the struggle goes on, not out of any sham emotionalism but out of duty both to those who have died and future generations and out of the recognition that peace and prosperity depends on victory being achieved.'[26] Neither of the two statements attempted to address how the continuation of the armed struggle could achieve victory, but perhaps they did illustrate that the primary motivation for the republican movement to carry on, is simply because it always *has* carried on.

The task of the strategist is usually to ask the *how* of it all. *How* has the republican movement viewed the use of force in the political process? *How* has ideological symbolism affected the employment of the military instrument? *How* do the Provisionals attempt to obtain their objectives? And so on. Now that it has been suggested that the process of republican strategic formulation sometimes distorts the application of force for realisable ends, it is perhaps necessary for someone else to ask the

25. Interview with PIRA spokesperson, *Magill*, Aug. 1978.
26. *AP/RN*, 16 April 1987.

more complicated question as to *why* the Provisionals persist in the manner they do? Maybe this thesis will help light the path to a comprehensive appraisal of this question by stimulating research in this area.

During the 1988 Bodenstown speech, Pat Doherty affirmed that 'the armed struggle is about achieving the political demands for national self-determination, an end to partition and the creation of a 32 County Irish Republic.'[27] Yet over 20 years after taking up arms in defence of a long tradition of physical force nationalism, the Provisional IRA still looks no closer to this objective than when it started. No-one can deny that PIRA's violence has not had an impact. It may have placed the issue of Northern Ireland on the political agenda and stimulated efforts to resolve the conflict, but this does not mean that the Provisionals have necessarily been the beneficiaries. Possibly the most tangible effect of PIRA's armed struggle to date has been to further polarise sectarian divisions in Northern Ireland, making the prospect of arriving at any solution which the Provisionals might find acceptable even more improbable. Given this situation, one might plausibly ask whether, in strategic terms, the Provisional IRA is as good as defeated? This is not to say that the Provisionals still do not possess significant destructive potential. Reports over the past couple of years suggest that the movement is supplied with sufficient arms and recruits to keep it going for years to come.[28] The point is, though, that physical extinction is not a pre-requisite for strategic failure, merely the inability to attain designated ends with chosen means. PIRA's quandary in this respect is that the British government seems content to contain the conflict at a point which it finds tolerable. This may not be the ideal scenario for the British authorities, but it is one where the Provisionals cannot pose

27. P. Doherty, 'We Will Win this Struggle', Bodenstown Speech, *AP/RN*, 23 June 1988.
28. See for example, D. McKittrick, 'Semtex in Terrorist Armoury is Key to Growing Threat', *The Independent*, 31 Dec. 1988.

any serious threat to the *status quo*. So, for the Provisionals themselves, just to exist may be a sufficient achievement. In 1985, when it was put to Gerry Adams that the armed struggle was not up to much these days, he replied that after all that had been thrown at the movement and all the talk of imminent defeats and the power of the British, he thought that PIRA was actually 'doing very well.'[29] This may be so, but while fighting to survive without any real chance of reaching proposed ends may satisfy certain internal imperatives to engage in armed action, ultimately, it means very little in strategic theory.

The purpose of this conclusion is not to belittle a highly complex phenomenon or to imply that the entire Irish republican military experience can be reduced to a few trite strategic equations. That Irish republican violence is a manifestation of important social, economic and political factors which deserve sensitive handling by those responsible for managing the conflict is not disputed. Nor is the intention to be iconoclastic in order to demythologise Irish republicanism. The myths of republican ideology will survive anything this thesis says. But if this analysis does challenge any popularly held assumptions, then it is the idea that the Provisional IRA's employment of the military instrument is necessarily conditioned by responses which accord with the norms of strategic theory.

29. Quoted in *The Irish News*, 2 Nov. 1985.

APPENDICES

CHRONOLOGY

1791
Society of the United Irishmen founded in Belfast.

1798
23 May: United Irishmen launch rebellion.
July: Rebellion around Wexford defeated at Battle of Vinegar Hill.
19 November: Wolfe Tone committed suicide following his capture after the French invasion force in which he was sailing had been intercepted by Royal Navy in September.

1800
Act of Union between Britain and Ireland.

1803
23 July: Robert Emmet leads attempt to seize Dublin Castle. Rebellion collapses immediately.
20 September: Emmet executed.

1823
The Catholic Association formed led by Daniel O'Connell.

1842
Foundation of the Young Ireland newspaper, *The Nation*, edited by Thomas Davis.

1845
John Mitchel takes over the editorship of *The Nation* on Davis' death.
Beginning of potato blight, to become known as the Great Famine, 1845-49. Nearly a million perish and another million emigrate, mainly to the USA, Canada and Australia. Over the next 50 years the Irish population would be halved, due mainly to emigration, from over 8 million in 1841 to 4.5 million in 1901.

1846
Young Ireland split from Daniel O'Connell's Repeal Association.

1846
January: Young Irelanders set up their own organisation, the Irish Confederation.

1848
Early in year John Mitchel leaves *The Nation* to found *The United Irishman*.
Young Irelanders mount short lived rebellion under William Smith O'Brien, defeated after skirmish at Ballingarry, Co. Tipperary, 5 August.

1858
17 March: Foundation of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, also known as the Fenians, led by James Stephens in Ireland and John O'Mahoney in USA.

1867
March: Fenian uprising.
November: Execution of 3 Fenians - the 'Manchester Martyrs' - following killing of policeman during rescue of 2 IRB prisoners in Manchester.

December: Fenian bomb outside Clerkenwell prison kills a dozen people.

1870
Home Government Association formed under Isaac Butt to campaign for return of self-government to Ireland.

1879
Land League formed by Michael Davitt and Charles Stewart Parnell.

1881
January: Fenian bombing campaign in England, sponsored by the American Arm of the Fenians the Clan-na-Gael, begins with attack on Salford Barracks. The bombings continue intermittently until 1887.
April: Land Act introduced following widespread agitation on the land organised by the Land League.

1882
6 May: Secretary of State for Ireland, Lord Frederick Cavendish, and Under-Secretary, T.H. Burke, stabbed to death in Dublin by the Irish Invincibles, known as the Phoenix Park Murders.
Gaelic Athletic Association formed.

1886
First Home Rule Bill defeated in House of Commons.

1893
Second Home Rule Bill defeated in House of Lords.
Gaelic League formed.

1907
Sinn Fein formed under leadership of Arthur Griffith.

1912
Third Home Rule Bill passed.
Ulster Volunteer Force formed to oppose imposition of home rule.

1913
Irish Volunteers formed to resist threat from UVF.
Irish Citizen Army formed by James Connolly.

1914
Outbreak of World War One.
Irish Volunteers split over attitude to World War One with majority following call of John Redmond to enlist in British Army, leaving smaller group under Eoin MacNeill opposed to involvement in the war.

1916
Easter Rising in Dublin.
May: Leaders of Rising like Patrick Pearse and James Connolly executed.

1917
Eamon de Valera elected President of Sinn Fein.
Sinn Fein win a number of by-elections.

1918
December: Sinn Fein win 73 seats in general election.

1919
21 January: Dail Eireann formed. Two policemen killed at Soloheadbeg, Co. Tipperary, signalling the start of the Anglo-Irish war.

1920
Widespread violence.
Attacks on police and army by units of Irish Volunteers, increasingly known as the IRA.
British introduce Auxiliaries and 'Black and Tans' to support security forces.
December: Government of Ireland Act provides Northern Ireland with its own assembly and government at Stormont.

1921
Violence continues.
7 June: Northern Ireland parliament opened.
11 July: Truce declared between British and IRA.
Negotiations on peace settlement arranged.
6 December: Anglo-Irish Treaty reached between British and Irish delegations.

1922
7 January: Dail approves Anglo-Irish Treaty, 64 votes to 57.
March: IRA splits into pro and anti-Treaty factions.
April: Anti-Treaty IRA or 'Irregulars' set up headquarters at Four Courts in centre of Dublin.
June: The pro-Treaty party, Cumann na nGaedheal, win large majority in elections to the first Irish Free State parliament.
28 June: Free State forces attack IRA Irregulars at Four Courts, signalling start of Irish civil war.
Widespread violence ensues.
11 September: Free State parliament, or Dail Eireann, opened.
October: Free State government introduces severe measures to curb IRA violence.

1923
27 April: IRA orders ceasefire bringing civil war to a close.
Sinn Fein wins 44 seats in general election.

1926
16 May: De Valera and some of his colleagues in Sinn Fein split from the anti-Treatyites to form Fianna Fail.

1927
12 August: Fianna Fail deputies enter Dail for the first time.

1931
Saor Eire, a republican-socialist group, is formed.
October: Free State outlaws IRA and Saor Eire.

1932
Fianna Fail wins general election. De Valera becomes Prime Minister.

1933
9 September: Fine Gael party formed out of old Cumann na nGaedheal.

1934
Peadar O'Donnell and George Gilmore set up short-lived Republican Congress.

1936
June: De Valera government declares IRA illegal.

1937
New Constitution changes name of Free State to Eire and claims territorial jurisdiction over Northern Ireland.

1938
April: IRA Convention approves a bombing campaign in England.

1939
12 January: IRA ultimatum threatens to declare war on Britain unless its forces withdraw from Northern Ireland.
16 January: IRA begins bombing campaign in England.
August: 5 people killed by IRA bomb in Coventry.

1940
January: Irish government passes Emergency Powers Act to intern IRA suspects.
IRA bombing campaign in England peters out.

1946
Clann na Phoblachta, a small group of disaffected republicans, is formed.

1948
A Fine-Gael/Clann na Phoblachta coalition wins power from Fianna Fail.

1948
Irish government declares the country a full republic.
British government passes Ireland Act in which Northern Ireland's position in UK guaranteed so long as the Stormont parliament wishes.

1953
July: Sean MacStiofain and Cathal Goulding gaoled for abortive arms raid in Felstead, Essex.

1954
June: IRA mount arms raid on Gough Barracks, Co. Armagh.

1955
May: In British general election Sinn Fein gains 152,310 votes in Northern Ireland and wins 2 seats for its abstentionist candidates.

1956
11 December: IRA launch border campaign against Northern Ireland.
Northern Ireland government introduces internment.

1957
March: Fianna Fail returned to power in Irish general election.
July: De Valera introduces internment in Irish Republic.

1959
Sean Lemass replaces de Valera as Irish premier.
October: In British general election Sinn Fein vote halved to 73,415.

1962
26 February: IRA calls off border campaign.
Cathal Goulding becomes Chief of Staff of IRA and embarks on reassessment of IRA strategy.

1963
March: Terence O'Neill becomes Prime Minister of Northern Ireland.

1964
Campaign for Social Justice formed to lobby for civil rights reform.

1966
Series of UVF killings - organisation declared illegal in Northern Ireland.

1967
January: Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association formed.

1968
August: First Civil Rights march from Coalisland to Dungannon.

1969
January: Civil Rights march from Belfast to Derry attacked by loyalist crowd at Burntollet Bridge.
19 April: Rioting in Bogside, Derry.
28 April: Terence O'Neill replaced as Northern Ireland Prime Minister by James Chichester-Clark.
12-14 August: Severe rioting in Bogside, Derry.
14 August: British troops sent onto streets of Derry.
15 August: British troops also enter Belfast to quell disturbances.
December: Extra-ordinary IRA Convention approves ending of abstention. Opposition delegation form PIRA Army Council.

1970
11 January: Split between Official and Provisional wings of IRA confirmed at Sinn Fein Ard-Fheis when a third of delegates opposed to the ending of abstention walk out to form Provisional Sinn Fein.
March/April: Widespread rioting between British Army and young Catholics in West Belfast.
1 April: Ulster Defence Regiment formed to replace RUC B Specials.
July: Curfew imposed by British Army on Lower Falls area of West Belfast.
21 August: Social Democratic and Labour Party formed.
October: PIRA begins sustained bombing campaign, mainly against commercial targets.

1971
6 February: First British soldier to be killed by PIRA.
20 March: James Chichester-Clark resigns as Northern Ireland Prime Minister and is replaced by Brian Faulkner.
June: PSF issue Eire Nua programme.
9 August: Stormont government introduces internment.
September: PIRA set out 5-point peace plan.
Ulster Defence Association formed.
4 December: 15 people killed by UVF bomb at McGurks Bar, Belfast.

1972
30 January: Parachute Regiment shoot dead 13 men during a civil rights demonstration in Derry, the incident becomes known as 'Bloody Sunday'.

22 February: Official IRA bomb kills 7 people at Parachute Regiment's headquarters in Aldershot.
10 March: PIRA call 3-day ceasefire.
20 March: 6 people killed by PIRA car bomb in Donegall Street, Belfast.
24 March: Stormont parliament suspended. Direct rule from Westminster introduced. William Whitelaw appointed Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.
20 May: OIRA announces ceasefire.
14 June: Whitelaw grants special category status (political status) for prisoners convicted of paramilitary offences.
22 June: PIRA announces ceasefire.
26 June: Ceasefire comes into effect.
1 July: UDA erect 'no-go' areas in loyalist districts to match those in nationalist areas of Derry and Belfast.
7 July: PIRA delegation meets William Whitelaw in London. Nothing is agreed.
9 July: Ceasefire collapses over PIRA claims that British Army had broken truce during incident at Lenadoon, West Belfast.
21 July: 9 people killed in PIRA bombing assault in Belfast, the incident becomes known as 'Bloody Friday'.
31 July: British Army launches Operation Motorman to retake 'no-go' areas of Derry and Belfast. 8 people killed in car-bomb in Claudy, Co. Londonderry.
24 September: Whitelaw initiates conference at Darlington to consider political options for the province.
19 November: PIRA Chief of Staff, Sean MacStiofain, arrested in Irish Republic and sentenced to 6 months for IRA membership. His arrest ends his involvement in PIRA activities. Seamus Twomey becomes new Chief of Staff.

1973
8 March: Border poll in Northern Ireland produces large vote for staying in UK. PIRA car bombs in London kill 1 person and injure 180.
28 June: Voting for new Northern Irish Assembly. PSF call to boycott elections ignored.
December: Sunningdale conference agrees to establish a Power Sharing Executive for the province.

1974
January: Power Sharing Executive takes office under leadership of Brian Faulkner. Immense unionist objections to Executive, especially to Council of Ireland.
5 March: Following Labour victory in British general election, Merlyn Rees made new Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.
15 May: Ulster Workers Council (UWC) Strike aimed at bringing down Power Sharing Executive begins.
17 May: 30 people killed in Irish Republic by loyalist car bombs in Dublin and Monaghan - highest loss of life in any single day of conflict to date.
28 May: UWC strike forces collapse of Power Sharing Executive.
4 July: Secretary of State, Merlyn Rees, announces the setting up of a Constitutional Convention to work out a new form of devolved government for the province.
5 October: 5 people killed by bomb explosions in two pubs in Guildford.
21 November: 21 people killed by bomb explosions in two pubs in Birmingham.
25 November: Home Secretary, Roy Jenkins, announces introduction of a series of anti-terrorist measures, the Prevention of Terrorism Act, which makes the IRA an illegal organisation in Great Britain and extends the powers of arrest and detention.

December: Irish Republican Socialist Party formed by OIRA breakaway group led by Seamus Costello. Over the next few months the IRSP establishes a military wing - later known as the Irish National Liberation Army.
10 December: PIRA announces a ceasefire to run from 22 December to 2 January 1976.

1975
2 January: PIRA ceasefire extended.
16 January: PIRA calls off ceasefire.
10 February: PIRA suspends operations against security forces after new ceasefire negotiated.
Incident centres set up by PSF to monitor ceasefire and liaise with Northern Ireland Office.
February: Violent feud breaks out in Belfast between OIRA and INLA.
1 May: Polling takes place for Northern Ireland Constitutional Convention.
24 July: Rees promises to release internees by end of year.
31 July: 3 members of Miami Showband killed in UVF ambush, 2 UVF men also killed by their own bomb during the attack.
September: 5 Protestants killed at Tullyvallen Orange Hall by South Armagh Republican Action Force, widely believed to be a cover name for PIRA's units in the area.
11 November: Rees closes down incident centres.
5 December: Last series of internees released.

1976
4 January: 5 Catholics killed in shooting incidents near Whitecross, South Armagh.
5 January: 10 Protestant workmen killed by SARAF attack on their mini-bus outside Kingsmills, South Armagh.
7 January: Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, announces SAS to move into South Armagh, though SAS widely suspected to be there already.
1 March: Special category status ended for those convicted of paramilitary offences.
9 March: Northern Ireland Convention dissolved after failure of participants to agree on a form of power-sharing system.
10 August: 3 children killed in Andersonstown, West Belfast, when car pursued by British Army careers out of control after the driver had been shot dead. Incident provided impetus for the establishment of Peace People. Next few months sees large-scale demonstrations to call for an end to violence.
September: Protest in Maze Prison against the ending of special category status begins when Ciaran Nugent refuses to wear prison uniform.
10 September: Roy Mason, new Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.
28 October: Maire Drumm, Vice-President of PSF, shot dead by UVF.
25-27 December: PIRA Christmas ceasefire.

1977
3 May: Loyalist strike launched as protest against the British government's security policy and to demand return of majority rule in Northern Ireland.
13 May: Loyalist strike called off after failing to rally support and in face of the British government's determination to resist stikers' demands.
June: Jimmy Drumm tells PIRA supporters at Bodenstown that previous strategy had been mistaken.
27 July: 4 people killed in PIRA/OIRA feud.
5 October: IRSP leader, Seamus Costello, shot dead almost certainly by OIRA.

1978
17 February: PIRA fire bombs kill 12 people at the La Mon Hotel, Co. Down.
30 November: PIRA says it is preparing for a long war after widespread fire bombing campaign throughout province.

1979
20 February: 11 Protestants known as the 'Shankill Butchers' sentenced to life imprisonment for series of sectarian murders carried out in mid-1970s.
30 March: Airey Neave, Conservative shadow spokesman on Northern Ireland, killed by INLA car bomb in House of Commons car-park, London.
5 May: Humphrey Atkins, new Secretary of State for Northern Ireland following election of Conservative government on 3 May.
2 July: INLA declared illegal.
27 August: Lord Mountbatten and 4 of his companions killed when PIRA bomb planted on his boat explodes off Mullaghmore, Co. Sligo. 18 soldiers killed in double-bomb ambush at Warrenpoint, Co. Down - biggest daily loss suffered by Army in Northern Ireland to date.
29 September: On visit to Ireland, the Pope appeals for an end to violence.
2 October: PIRA rejects Pope's appeal claiming only force could remove the British.

1980
7 January: Constitutional conference convened at Stormont to debate forms of government for the province.
27 October: PIRA prisoners in Maze prison begin hunger strike to demand the restoration of political status.
18 December: Hunger strikes called off.

1981
21 January: Former speaker of Stormont parliament, Sir Norman Stronge and his son James, killed by PIRA gunmen.
1 March: Second hunger strike begins in Maze prison.
9 April: Hunger striker, Bobby Sands, elected MP for Fermanagh and South Tyrone following the death of the sitting member, Frank Maguire in April.
5 May: Bobby Sands dies on 66th day of his hunger strike causing widespread rioting in Belfast and Derry.
12 May: Second hunger striker, Francis Hughes dies.
19 May: 5 soldiers killed in land mine attack near Bessbrook, South Armagh.
20 August: Owen Carron, Bobby Sands' election agent, elected MP for Fermangh and South Tyrone in the by-election caused by Sands' death.
13 September: James Prior becomes new Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.
3 October: Hunger strike called off after 10 republican prisoners in all had died.
10 October: PIRA bombs kills 2 civilians and injures 23 soldiers outside Chelsea Barracks in London.
14 November: PIRA kill Reverend Robert Bradford, Official Unionist MP for South Belfast.
23 November: Loyalist day of action to protest at British government's security policy - rallies and marches all over province.

1982
April: James Prior issues White Paper on proposal for 'rolling devolution' Assembly which would agree on measures of self-government for the province.
20 July: PIRA bombs in London kill 11 soldiers.
20 October: Voting takes place for 'rolling devolution' Assembly. PSF gain 10.1% of the vote in Northern Ireland compared to the SDLP's 18.8%.

27 October: 3 RUC officers killed in PIRA booby trap, near Lurgan, Co. Armagh.
6 December: 11 off-duty soldiers and 6 civilians killed by bomb planted by INLA at the 'Droppin Well' pub at Ballykelly, Co. Londonderry.

1983
April: Conclusion of first 'supergrass' trial when 14 UVF men convicted on evidence of Joseph Bennett.
24 May: PIRA bomb Andersonstown RUC Station, West Belfast, causing extensive damage to neighbouring houses.
9 June: British general election. PSF gains 13.4% of the vote and Gerry Adams wins the seat of West Belfast. The unionist parties win 15 seats and the SDLP one seat.
5 August: 30 people convicted on evidence of PIRA 'supergrass' Christopher Black.
25 September: 38 PIRA prisoners escape from Maze prison, during which a prison officer is killed.
13 November: Gerry Adams elected PSF President.
7 December: Official Unionist Assembly member, Edgar Graham, shot dead by PIRA in Belfast.
17 December: 5 people killed when PIRA bomb explodes outside Harrods department store in London.

1984
14 June: European election poll. PSF gain 13.3% of vote in Northern Ireland.
10 September: Douglas Hurd appointed new Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.
12 October: PIRA bomb planted at Grand Hotel, Brighton, explodes during Conservative Party Conference. Conservative Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, narrowly escapes death but 5 others killed.
2 December: SAS soldier and PIRA member killed during shoot-out at Drumrush, Co. Fermanagh.
6 December: 2 PIRA men shot dead by SAS soldiers in Derry.

1985
28 February: 9 RUC officers killed in PIRA mortar attack on police station at Newry, Co. Down.
20 April: 4 leading PIRA members expelled from organisation after alleged disagreements over movement's new political orientation.
20 May: Local government elections - PSF wins 11.4% of vote in the province and 59 seats.
2 September: Tom King becomes new Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.
15 November: Irish Prime Minister, Garret FitzGerald, and British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, sign Anglo-Irish Agreement at Hillsborough, Co. Down.
16 November: Unionist MPs say they will resign their seats in protest at the Anglo-Irish Agreement in order to cause a series of by-elections over the issue.
23 November: Large Loyalist demonstration held in Belfast to protest at Anglo-Irish Agreement.

1986
23 January: In the 15 by-elections caused by the resignations of unionist MPs, the unionist parties increase the size of their vote (71.5%) on their 1983 general election performance (62.3%) but lost the seat of Newry and Armagh to the SDLP. PSF gained only 6.6% of the vote.

26 February: Loyalist day of action against the Anglo-Irish Agreement causes widespread disruption to most areas of the province.
31 March-1 April: Serious loyalist rioting in Portadown, Co. Armagh.
15 May: Renewed loyalist protests to mark 6 month anniversary of Anglo-Irish Agreement.
29 May: Tom King announces that Northern Ireland Assembly will be dissolved.
6-16 July: Serious loyalist rioting in Portadown.
2 November: PSF Ard-Fheis votes to end abstention from the Leinster House parliament in the Irish Republic. The vote causes some former PSF members to break away to establish Republican Sinn Fein.
10 November: New unionist paramilitary style grouping, Ulster Resistance, formed to oppose the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

1987
19 February: In general election in the Irish Republic, PSF gains 1.9% of the vote and fails to win a seat.
26 March: Announcement of end of internal feud within INLA which had claimed a number of lives over the previous year.
11 April: Muted response to loyalist 'Day of Defiance' to protest at Anglo-Irish Agreement.
25 April: Lord Justice Maurice Gibson and his wife killed by PIRA car bomb at Killeen, Co. Down close to border with Irish Republic.
8 May: 8 PIRA men killed in SAS ambush as they tried to place a bomb at Loughall, RUC Station, Co. Armagh; a civilian also died in the shoot-out.
12 June: In British general election PSF gains 11.4% of the vote in Northern Ireland. Gerry Adams retains his seat.
8 November: PIRA bomb kills 11 people at a Remembrance Day ceremony in Enniskillen, Co. Fermanagh.
30 November: New Extradiction Act comes into effect in Irish Republic.
22 December: Deputy leader of UDA, John McMichael, killed by PIRA car bomb.

1988
January: PSF-SDLP talks begin.
6 March: 3 PIRA members shot dead by SAS in Gibraltar.
16 March: 3 mourners killed at Milltown Cemetery, West Belfast, by loyalist gunman during funerals of those PIRA members killed in Gibraltar.
19 March: Two Army corporals attacked and killed when their car got caught up in funeral cortege in Andersonstown, West Belfast.
1 May: 3 RAF men killed in gun and bomb attacks in the Netherlands and West Germany.
15 June: 6 off-duty soldiers killed by bomb planted under their van in Lisburn, Co. Antrim.
23 July: PIRA bomb intended for High Court judge kills all 3 members of the Hanna family as they were returning over the border from the Irish Republic.
20 August: 8 off-duty soldiers killed by PIRA bomb attack on their bus at Ballygawley, Co. Tyrone.
30 August: SAS shoot dead 3 PIRA men in ambush near Drumnakilly, Co. Tyrone.
2 September: PSF-SDLP talks end.
19 October: Home Secretary, Douglas Hurd, announces restrictions on the broadcast of interviews with members of paramilitary organisations and their supporters.

1989
January: PSF President, Gerry Adams, publicly cautions PIRA over increasing number of civilian deaths caused by its operations.
17 May: Local elections in Northern Ireland sees PSF win 11.3% of vote.

16 June: In general election in Irish Republic PSF gain only 1.2% of the vote.
20 June: Polling in European elections sees PSF gain 2.3% of vote in Irish Republic and 9.2% in Northern Ireland.
24 July: Peter Brooke becomes new Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.
14 August: Twentieth anniversary of introduction of British Army onto streets of Northern Ireland.
22 September: 10 Royal Marines bandsmen killed when PIRA bomb explodes at their base in Deal, Kent.
17 October: 4 people imprisoned for the Guildford pub bombings in 1974 released on appeal on the grounds that their convictions were unsafe when the Director of Public Prosecutions withdrew evidence against them.
25 October: PIRA shoot dead an RAF serviceman and his six-month old daughter in Wildenrath, West Germany.

1990
9 January: PSF publicity director, Danny Morrison, charged along with 4 others of conspiracy to murder and membership of IRA.
9 April: 4 UDR soldiers killed by PIRA land-mine outside Downpatrick, Co. Down.
27 May: 2 Australian tourists shot dead by PIRA in Roermond, the Netherlands.
24 July: 3 RUC officers and a Catholic nun killed in PIRA bomb attack just outside Armagh city.
30 July: Ian Gow MP, former parliamentary private secretary to Margaret Thatcher, killed by car bomb at his home in Hankham, Sussex.
9 October: 2 PIRA men shot dead by SAS near Loughall, Co. Armagh.
24 October: 6 soldiers and a civilian killed in 2 simultaneous PIRA human proxy bombs which were driven into border checkpoints at Coshquin, near Derry, where 5 soldiers and the civilian were killed and at Cloghoge, near Newry, Co. Armagh where one soldier died.
29 October: PSF publicity director, Danny Morrison, committed for trial along with 8 others accused of unlawful imprisonment and PIRA membership.
10 November: 4 people, 2 off-duty policemen and 2 civilians shot dead by PIRA at Castor Bay, near Lurgan.

1991
7 February: PIRA mount mortar attack on Downing Street, London, while (Gulf War) War Cabinet was in session; no-one is injured.
18 February: PIRA bomb at Victoria Station, London, kills one person and injures 40 others.
3 March: 4 people killed by UVF attack on a bar in Cappagh, Co. Tyrone.
14 March: 6 men imprisoned for Birmingham pub bombings in 1974 released on appeal on the grounds that their convictions were unsafe and unsatisfactory.
30 April: Inter-party talks on the political future of Northern Ireland involving the constitutional parties in the province, get underway at Stormont.
8 May: Former PSF publicity director, Danny Morrison, found guilty of unlawfully imprisoning a police informer, though he and 6 others acquitted of conspiracy to murder. He was sentenced to 8 years in prison.
4 June: 3 PIRA men killed in SAS ambush in village of Coagh, Co. Tyrone.
3 July: Following protracted procedural difficulties the inter-party talks in Northern Ireland brought to an end.

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